

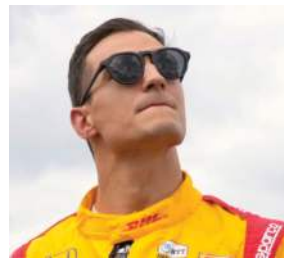
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# STARS AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

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CONTINGENCY EDITION

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2025

Free to Deployed Areas



EMILY HAZELBAKER/U.S. Marine Corps

**A U.S. Marine conducts a communications check during an exercise at Courthouse Bay on Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C. on Feb. 4. Special operations commanders have expressed concern over their adversaries outpacing the United States in technology advancements.**

## Special ops face tech challenge

Commanders concerned US cannot keep pace as adversaries advance

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The commanders of special operations forces told lawmakers Wednesday that they were worried about the speed of technological advancement among adversaries and feared the U.S. was not keeping up.

The advantage that the U.S.

had for decades in being able to “sense the enemy before they sense us” has eroded with the proliferation of modern technologies among great powers and terrorist and criminal groups, said Maj. Gen. Peter Huntley, who leads the Marine Forces Special Operations Command.

**SEE TECH ON PAGE 3**



ERIC KAYNE/Stars and Stripes

**Rear Adm. Milton Sands, left, and Marine Maj. Gen. Peter Huntley on Wednesday testify about technology concerns in Washington.**

## DOD firings drew little pushback from GOP

BY MATT BROWN  
*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — When the Senate unanimously confirmed Gen. ‘CQ’ Brown Jr. as Air Force chief of staff in 2020, President Donald Trump hailed a “historic day for America!” on social media and said he was “Excited to work

even more closely with Gen. Brown, who is a Patriot and Great Leader!”



**Brown**

Trump’s Feb. 21 social media post firing Brown, who had since risen to the military’s top uniformed officer, was comparatively reserved. The Republican president dismissed Brown, the second African American to serve as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, along with five other Pentagon officials in a rare move that some critics fear pushes politics into an institution vaunted for its nonpartisanship and adherence to the Constitution.

On Capitol Hill, the move drew little criticism from many Republican senators who had once hailed Brown’s service to the nation.

“My understanding is the president does have the ability to decide who he wants to be as chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Gen. Brown, I believe, has done an excellent job,” said Sen. Mike Rounds, R-S.D.

“I would’ve been more than happy if the president had left him right in there. But the president has the ability and the authority to make up his own mind as to who he wants,” said Rounds, a member of the Senate Armed

**SEE FIRINGS ON PAGE 7**



BUSINESS/WEATHER

Nvidia sales surge in 4th quarter amid AI chip demand

Associated Press  
LOS ANGELES — Nvidia on Wednesday reported a surge in fourth-quarter profit and sales as demand for its specialized Blackwell chips, which power artificial intelligence systems, continued to grow, sending the company's stock higher after hours.  
For the three months that ended Jan. 26, the tech giant based in Santa Clara, Calif., posted revenue of \$39.3 billion, up 12% from the previous quarter and 78% from one year ago. Adjusted for one-

time items, it earned 89 cents a share.  
“Demand for Blackwell is amazing as reasoning AI adds another scaling law — increasing compute for training makes models smarter and increasing compute for long thinking makes the answer smarter,” Nvidia Founder Jensen Huang said in a statement.  
Nvidia has ramped up the massive-scale production of Blackwell AI supercomputers, Huang said, “achieving billions of dollars in sales in its first quarter.”

“AI is advancing at light speed as agentic AI and physical AI set the stage for the next wave of AI to revolutionize the largest industries,” he said.  
Wednesday's earnings report topped Wall Street expectations. Analysts had been expecting adjusted earnings of 85 cents a share on revenue of \$38.1 billion, according to FactSet.  
Nvidia reported net income of \$22.06 billion in the fourth quarter, beating analysts' predictions of \$19.57 billion.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates			
Euro costs (Feb. 28)	0.93	Switzerland (Franc)	0.8994
British pound (Feb. 28)	\$1.24	Thailand (Baht)	34.06
Japanese yen (Feb. 28)	145.00	Turkey (NewLira)	36.4339
South Korean won (Feb. 28)	1400.00	(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.)	
Commercial rates		INTEREST RATES	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3768	Prime rate	7.50
Britain (Pound)	1.2629	Interest Rates Discount rate	4.50
Canada (Dollar)	1.4426	Federal funds market rate	4.33
China (Yuan)	7.2600	3-month bill	4.30
Denmark (Krone)	7.1575	30-year bond	4.51
Egypt (Pound)	50.6714		
Euro	0.9596		
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7757		
Hungary (Forint)	384.02		
Israel (Shekel)	3.5643		
Japan (Yen)	149.72		
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.7095		
Norway (Krone)	11.2283		
Philippines (Peso)	57.97		
Poland (Zloty)	3.98		
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7503		
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3467		
South Korea (Won)	1449.28		

WEATHER OUTLOOK



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MILITARY

N. Korea reportedly sends more troops to Russia

By DAVID CHOI  
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea appears to have deployed additional troops to Russia this month to reinforce Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine, South Korean media outlets reported Thursday, citing the South’s National Intelligence Service.

The Seoul-based spy agency is assessing how many North Korean forces were sent to the Kursk region of Russia in the first week of February after a monthlong pause in deployments, according to an agency statement cited Thursday by Yonhap News.

Between 1,000 and 3,000 North

Korean troops were sent on Russian cargo ships and military aircraft between January and February, multiple unnamed sources told the JoongAng Ilbo in a separate report Thursday.

The newspaper, citing unidentified sources, also reported that Russia’s military has repeatedly asked North Korea to accept the remains of its service members killed on the battlefield, but it has so far refused.

The South Korean military continues to track North Korea’s troop deployments, South Korean army Col. Lee Sung-jun, a Joint Chiefs spokesman, said during a news conference Thursday at the Minis-

try of National Defense. He declined to comment on the reports.

Between 10,000 and 12,000 North Korean troops are estimated to have deployed to Russia as early as October to fight in the three-year conflict, according to the U.S. and Ukrainian militaries. Of those, roughly 3,000 were killed or wounded during the fighting, South Korean lawmakers said in January, citing a closed-door briefing by the intelligence service.

“New assaults” were occurring in Kursk and North Korean soldiers were being “brought in again,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a video

address on Feb. 7.

“A significant number of occupiers have been eliminated — we’re talking hundreds of Russian and North Korean servicemen,” he said.

A North Korean soldier captured by Ukrainian forces said he and about 100 others arrived in Russia by ferry, according to an edited video interview posted on Zelenskyy’s X account in January.

The North’s state-run Korean Central News Agency has yet to confirm its troops have been deployed to Russia.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin last met in June in Py-

ongyang, where they agreed to provide mutual military aid if either were at war.

On Monday, the U.S. joined North Korea, Iran and 15 other countries in voting against a U.N. General Assembly resolution drafted by Ukraine that blamed Russia for the “devastating and long-lasting” war; the resolution passed with 93 votes in favor.

An amended resolution drafted by the U.S. acknowledging “the tragic loss of life through the Russian Federation-Ukraine conflict,” but without recognizing Moscow as the aggressor, was adopted by the assembly and the U.N. Security Council the same day.

USS Truman back in Mideast following repairs in Greece

By ALISON BATH  
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman returned to the Middle East this week after a stay at a Navy base in Greece for repairs following a collision with a cargo vessel in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

Truman and the destroyer USS Jason Dunham are in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations, a Defense Department official said Thursday on background because they were not authorized to speak publicly by name.

Truman’s transit Wednesday through the Suez Canal, which connects the Eastern Mediterranean to the Red Sea, also was noted by several ship watchers and analysts citing data from marinetraffic.com.

“She’s back,” Sal Mercogliano, an adjunct professor at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy and shipping expert, said in a post on the social media site X on Tuesday as the carrier neared the canal.

Truman had turned on its automatic identification system, or AIS, when the ship entered the congested area near Port Said, Egypt, on Tuesday as it prepared to enter the canal, he said.

Mercogliano noted in a Feb. 13 video posted to his YouTube ac-



USS HARRY S. TRUMAN/Facebook

**USS Harry S. Truman conducts routine flight operations in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations Monday, after departing Souda Bay, Greece, a day earlier, following the completion of repairs.**

count that Truman wasn’t using the system at the time of the late-night collision with the Panama-flagged cargo ship Besiktas-M near the Suez Canal on Feb. 12.

Jason Dunham, which was escorting Truman, also wasn’t using its AIS but turned it on shortly after the collision, Mercogliano said at the time. He noted that it wasn’t clear why the ships weren’t broadcasting their location.

At the time, the Navy wouldn’t say if Truman was operating its AIS prior to the collision, stating that it was too early in the investigation to comment on the circumstances of the incident.

In 2017, the Navy began requiring all warships to broadcast the signal in certain circumstances, such as high traffic areas.

The requirement followed two deadly collisions that same year in-

volving U.S. destroyers and merchant ships that killed seven and 10 sailors, respectively.

“AIS is primarily and foremost a navigation tool for collision avoidance,” the Coast Guard states on its website. “The AIS corroborates and provides identification and position of vessels not always possible through voice radio communication or radar alone.”

Other factors involved in the collision also offer insight into what may have happened, Steven Wills, a naval analyst with the Center for Maritime Strategy at the Navy League of the United States, told Stars and Stripes earlier this month.

International navigation regulations mandate that ships pass each other port-to-port, meaning their left sides must face each other, he said.

But photos of the vessels’ damage show contact on each ship’s right, or starboard, side.

“A starboard-to-starboard passage is irregular and suggests some kind of navigation problem for one or both ships,” Wills said.

A little more than a week after the collision, the service fired Capt. Dave Snowden, Truman’s commanding officer, citing a loss of confidence in his ability to command.

Capt. Chris Hill, commanding of-

ficer of the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, was named Truman’s interim commander.

The collision happened as Truman presumably was returning to the Middle East after a port call at Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete.

The carrier sustained damage to a line handling space, its fantail and a platform above a storage space. The exterior walls of two storage rooms and a maintenance space also were included in initial damage assessments.

Repairs and a thorough evaluation of Truman’s hull, which was penetrated well above the waterline on its right back end, required a one-week stay at Souda Bay.

Those repairs included removing damaged pieces of metal and installing weatherproofing bulkheads, which are interior vertical walls that form compartments in a ship, the Navy said earlier this week.

After leaving Norfolk, Va., in September for deployment to the U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations, Truman entered the Middle East on Dec. 14. The carrier spent nearly two months in the Red Sea defending against Iranian-backed Houthi militant attacks on shipping before departing earlier this month, first arriving at Souda Bay on Feb. 6.

Tech: General seeks streamlined innovation, funding, oversight processes

FROM PAGE 1

“They’re moving fast in terms of upgrading. We need to be able to move just as fast,” he said in testimony to a House Armed Services Committee subpanel. “That’s our main challenge going forward.”

Huntley said he was “greatly” concerned about the ability of special forces to keep pace with modernization and rapidly evolving technology such as artificial intelligence. Non-state actors, such as the Islamist militant

group al-Shabab and drug cartels in South America, are evolving quickly, he said.

“What they bring to the tactical fight is, frankly, pretty impressive,” Huntley said.

Lt. Gen. Jonathan Braga, commander of Army Special Operations Command, said his forces struggle with rapid innovation due to lengthy bureaucratic processes that can make the simple modification of commercial off-the-shelf drones take months or years.

Lt. Gen. Michael Conley, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, said modifications to his aircraft fleet also take too long. By the time an aircraft fleet is updated to modern needs, the technology is already irrelevant, he said.

“It’s this constant loop of trying to catch up with the enemy threat,” Conley said.

To make up for the gap, Air Force Special Forces have been “training our way out of it” by developing new tactics and proce-

dures, he said.

“But that’s only a small piece of what we really need as far as advanced modifications,” Conley said.

Rear Adm. Milton Sands III, commander of Naval Special Warfare Command, said the challenge and priority for his command is rapidly getting equipment required for the modern battlefield into the hands of service members.

Braga suggested that could be achieved through better stream-

lining of innovation, funding and oversight processes. Huntley said Special Forces must move quickly to remove barriers to modernization as technology continues to transform warfare.

“That’s just kind of where the tactical world is right now and that’s where it’s going,” he said. “We can identify that, we know what we have to do, but to be able to get those capabilities into the hands of our operators, or our small tactical units, I would describe as critical.”



## MILITARY

# Marines revise reenlistments for senior NCOs

BY LYDIA GORDON

*Stars and Stripes*

Senior enlisted Marines will soon be able to apply for reenlistments that extend their service to the end of their rank's time limitations, eliminating the need for periodic extensions.

The Enlisted Career Designation Program for career Marines will begin accepting applications on June 1.

Though it's currently designated as a pilot program, it appears to

be structured as a permanent change.

Under the new policy, master sergeants and first sergeants may serve up to 27 years on active duty, while master gunnery sergeants and sergeants major may remain on active duty for 30 years, without having to ask for periodic extensions.

To be eligible, Marines in those ranks must have at least 15 years of service or have spent at least two years in their current grade,

with a contract set to expire before Sept. 30, 2026, according to an administrative message issued Saturday.

"The program offers career Marines a more streamlined retention process, reducing uncertainty and administrative burdens by allowing them to voluntarily commit to long-term service," Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps Carlos Ruiz said in a Feb. 21 service statement.

All ranks will still be able to re-

quest resignation or retirement six to 18 months in advance provided they fulfill their obligated service requirements, the statement said.

Ruiz added that the initiative supports the Marine Corps' talent management strategy, which prioritizes retaining experienced, highly skilled Marines.

A deadline for the first round of applications has not yet been announced.

Marine Corps Manpower and

Reserve Affairs officials did not respond to questions this week about the duration of the pilot period, the deadlines for applications and any associated incentives to apply.

Other services have implemented similar programs in recent years to eliminate periodic reenlistments.

The Army's Career Status Program allows soldiers with 10 years of service to apply for an indefinite extension.

# Senator troubled by 'failures' after moving overhaul

BY WYATT OLSON

*Stars and Stripes*

U.S. Sen. Mark Warner is urging U.S. Transportation Command to take immediate action over "failures" in pickup and delivery of household goods for hundreds of relocating military families under a sweeping overhaul of how items are shipped and stored.

"As the military community enters the permanent change of station peak season, it is essential that our servicemembers and their families have the logistical support they need to meet the mission," the Virginia Democrat said in the letter Wednesday to Gen. Randall Reed, who heads the command.

The Defense Department is transferring oversight of the roughly 300,000 annual moves for the military and Coast Guard to HomeSafe Alliance, a joint venture between Tier One Relocation and KBR, formerly Kellogg Brown & Root.

The Transportation Command awarded HomeSafe a \$20 billion contract in late 2021 to implement the Global Household Goods Contract, or GHC.

Under GHC, HomeSafe is replacing about 900 companies that until now managed military moves by contracting with movers and trucking, shipping and warehousing companies.

During a media roundtable in late January, Transportation Command officials said that



WINIFRED BROWN/U.S. Army

**A mover loads a service member's household goods into a truck in Pacific Grove, Calif.**

roughly 1,000 service members had faced late pickups or deliveries of household goods under the ramp-up phase of GHC.

Warner compared the current spate of failures to problems a decade ago when he intervened on behalf of service members experiencing issues with shipping of personally owned vehicles.

"This delay cost military members hundreds of dollars in vehicle rental fees and untold aggravation with an unresponsive contractor, and I was pleased that USTRANSCOM implemented a plan to address contract performance," Warner wrote.

"I am disappointed to once again find that intervention is necessary to ensure the military community has what they need to focus on their jobs and families," he said.

The Transportation Command is aware of the letter and "greatly appreciates the Senator's concerns regarding the implementation of the Global Household Goods Contract," Scott Ross, a spokesman for the command, said in an email Wednesday.

"General Reed and U.S. TRANSCOM remain committed to delivering an improved moving experience to our service members

and their families and will respond to the questions posed in the letter," Ross said.

In an emailed statement Wednesday, HomeSafe said that logistical challenges have caused delays for some moves in the "early and developmental stages" of GHC.

"We apologize to every affected family," the email states. "HomeSafe is taking all the lessons learned and continually improving our systems and processes, including enhancing our customer care operations, updating our technology platform, reshaping our training program for service

providers, and hiring additional employees.

"Over the last few weeks, we have made significant progress in working through challenges and strengthening our network of service providers."

Warner requested that command officials brief the senator's staffers about the percentage of missed drop off and pick-ups due to capacity issues; options available to service members experiencing delays; assurances made by HomeSafe to build moving-contractor capacity; performance metrics being used to evaluate HomeSafe; and impacts to the command's staffing or budget due to intervention by the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE.

Warner singled out a statement in January by Andy Dawson, director of the command's Defense Personal Property Management Office, that in the transformation to GHC failures "are to be expected."

"I can assure you that the military families missing their beds, kitchen appliances, and comforts of home expect far more in terms of support," Warner wrote.

"We cannot be complacent in the performance of this contract or in the treatment the military families moving this [permanent change of station] season, particularly as your implementation schedule calls for domestic PCS moves to transition to this new contract this spring."

# Stratotanker joins string of precautionary landings on Okinawa

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY

*Stars and Stripes*

A KC-135 Stratotanker made a precautionary landing Wednesday at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa, according to a local media report.

The aerial refueler landed at 2:47 p.m., the Okinawa Times reported, citing unnamed sources and an uncredited photo. Firefighters and other service members were pictured in the photo

gathered near the aircraft's nose and left wing.

The 18th Wing at Kadena acknowledged phone and email queries Thursday by Stars and Stripes but did not provide responses before the end of the business day.

Kadena's 909th Air Refueling Squadron provides aerial refueling support to Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps and allied nations' aircraft.

They can also transport patients during aeromedical evacuations, according to the 18th Wing's website.

The incident is the latest in a string of precautionary landings at Kadena.

Two F-16 Fighting Falcons from Shaw Air Force Base, S.C., made precautionary landings, one each on Jan. 29 and Jan. 30, due to possible "jammed bullets," the Ryukyu Shimpo reported at the time.

An F-16 also made a precautionary landing Jan. 13 at Kadena, according to the Ryukyu Shimpo. A day earlier, an F-22 Raptor made a similar landing at the base, the newspaper reported.

The 18th Wing has not confirmed these incidents.

On Oct. 18, two Raptors experienced tire issues. One aircraft had two tire failures while landing, and another had a "tire malfunction prior to takeoff," according to

the wing.

Earlier in October, another Raptor made a precautionary landing, following a similar incident in September involving a Raptor deployed from Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Va.

No injuries or runway damage were reported in the October incidents, the wing said at the time.

Stars and Stripes reporter Keishi Koja contributed to this report.

MILITARY

# West Point colonel set for third arraignment

## Charges include drinking with cadets and lying about it

By ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

A West Point colonel who has had charges dropped twice for drinking with cadets and trying to undermine investigations into his actions now faces a third round of charges for the same accusations.

The U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., confirmed Col. William Wright is charged again with violating Army policy on trainer-trainee interactions, interfering with an adverse administrative proceeding and making a false official statement.

An arraignment date for the third set of charges was not listed as of Wednesday on the Army's on-line court docket. A listing for Wright's second court-martial shows those charges were dropped Jan. 2. The academy declined to comment on why this occurred.

Aimee Bateman, an attorney who represented Wright, said

Tuesday that she did not have a comment about the case.

The colonel is accused of providing alcohol to a cadet and drinking with the student on "a personal social basis" twice in June 2023 — once in Hilo, Hawaii, and again at Fort Greely, Alaska, according to the charge sheet.

Wright, who graduated from West Point in 1999, would travel with cadets as a chaperone for the tennis team as well as for research as part of his work as the director of the academy's Geospatial Information Science Program, according to his LinkedIn account.

The Army's public court-martial records database on Wednesday did not include documents from Wright's previous two cases that ended in a withdrawal of charges. Records typically take months to post, unlike the federal docket and court record system that tracks cases in real time.

Wright was first arraigned June 18 and the charges were dropped on Oct. 18 — just days before he was expected to plead guilty to some or all the charges.

Wright pleaded not guilty Dec. 2 during his second arraignment.

Throughout the legal process, Wright "is present for duty at West Point," according to a statement from the academy. He has been reassigned and does not have contact with cadets.

The charges filed against him in this third court-martial are unchanged from the second, according to West Point.

Since the first round of charges, prosecutors have dropped the charge of conduct unbecoming of an officer and added a count of interfering with an adverse administrative proceeding.

He now faces three counts of interference alongside three counts of disobeying orders or regula-



U.S. ARMY

**Col. William Wright was charged for a third time for accusations that he acted inappropriately with cadets and then lied about it during an administrative investigation.**

tions and two counts of making false statements, according to the charge sheet released after his second arraignment.

Wright is accused of violating an order to stay away from cadets on the women's tennis team in January 2024 and asking three people to lie in their testimony about drinking during an administrative proceeding. He is also accused of lying twice in his own official statement to a colonel who was investigating the accusations.

All names except Wright's were redacted from the description of charges against him.

This is Wright's second time serving as faculty for West Point. From 2008 to 2011, he served as an assistant professor in geospatial information science, according to his LinkedIn account. He then moved to Colorado to work for North American Aerospace Defense Command and later got a doctorate in geomatics from the University of Florida.

# China flies attack drone near Japan islands for 1st time

By BRIAN McELHINEY  
AND KEISHI KOJA  
*Stars and Stripes*

A Chinese reconnaissance and attack drone was spotted for the first time flying near Japan, as Beijing continues to ramp up aggressive moves in the Indo-Pacific.

The GJ-2 unmanned aerial vehicle was observed Wednesday morning and afternoon near Japan's southernmost islands, including Okinawa, according to a news release that day from Japan's Joint Staff.

The drone was first seen flying southeast from the East China Sea, passing between Okinawa's



JAPAN'S JOINT STAFF

**A Chinese BZK-005 reconnaissance drone was spotted near Japan's southern islands on Wednesday.**

main island and Miyako Island, about 175 miles to the southwest, before reaching the Pacific Ocean. Miyako is part of Okinawa prefecture.

It then continued northeast up the Ryukyu island chain until reaching Amami Oshima, an island in Kagoshima prefecture, where it turned around and flew back to the East China Sea, again passing between Okinawa and Miyako, the release said.

A Chinese military BZK-005 reconnaissance drone flew a nearly identical route at the same time Wednesday, according to the release. It did not specify whether the two drones were flying together.

The Japan Air Self-Defense Force scrambled aircraft in response, the release said.

A Joint Staff spokesman de-

clined to say how many aircraft were dispatched, what type they were or what specific actions were taken. The drones did not violate Japanese airspace, he said.

"We will continue to monitor developments in the airspace surrounding Japan with strong interest and will take all possible measures to conduct surveillance," he said.

Some Japanese government officials speak to the press only on condition of anonymity.

The GJ-2, also known as the Wing Loong II, is an upgraded variant of the Wing Loong, according to a U.S. Army fact sheet. It is

designed for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; electronic warfare; search-and-rescue; strike; peacekeeping; and border patrol missions. It can carry up to 12 air-to-surface missiles.

The drone flights coincided with Iron Fist, an annual amphibious exercise by the U.S. and Japan that runs through March 7 at various locations in Japan, including Okinawa.

In November 2022, the Air Self-Defense Force intercepted a BZK-005 drone along with a Y-9 intelligence-gathering aircraft and a Y-9 patrol aircraft flying between Okinawa and Miyako.

# Ex-sergeant ruled competent to stand trial on espionage charges

By GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEATTLE — A former Army sergeant for an intelligence unit at Joint Base Lewis-McChord who has been charged with trying to sell military secrets to the Chinese has been ruled competent to stand trial after nine months in a federal psychiatric facility, a U.S. district judge ruled.

Joseph Schmidt, 31, was charged by a grand jury on Oct. 3, 2023, with possessing national defense documents and attempting to supply them to China. He faces penalties of up to 10 years in jail

and a \$250,000 fine on each count. U.S. District Court Judge John Coughenour ruled Tuesday that Schmidt could stand trial.

Schmidt was a team leader in the human intelligence section of the 109th Military Intelligence Battalion at the Army-Air Force base in Washington, according to Army records.

An FBI report on the case said Schmidt left the Army in 2020 and went on a globe-trotting trip to Beijing, Istanbul and Hong Kong to try to meet with Chinese security agents, who he hoped would hire him as an expert in "interro-

gation" and "espionage."

The FBI said it was uncertain the Chinese ever met with Schmidt, but federal agents intercepted messages that he sent seeking meetings with Chinese agents and his online searches on spying techniques.

Schmidt was arrested Oct. 6, 2023, in San Francisco as he departed a flight from Hong Kong. Schmidt was later transferred to a federal jail near Seattle-Tacoma International Airport to await trial.

However, Coughenour ruled in May 2024 that Schmidt was not

mentally competent to "understand the nature and consequences of the proceedings against him or to assist properly in his defense."

Coughenour ordered Schmidt remanded to a federal psychiatric facility to "undergo competency restoration treatment, which might include, as necessary, individual therapy."

Government psychiatric doctors were to regularly submit reports to the court detailing Schmidt's mental competency.

At a competency hearing held Tuesday in Seattle federal court,

assistant U.S. Attorney Todd Greenberg and assistant Federal Public Defender Dennis Carroll agreed Schmidt's mental state had improved to the point that he could understand and aid his defense.

"Both sides had agreed he was competent, and Judge John Coughenour signed the order to that effect," said Emily Langlie, spokeswoman for the office of the U.S. Attorney for Western Washington. "The defense and prosecution will now meet to discuss a schedule moving forward toward a trial date."



## MILITARY

# Pentagon orders purge of social media sites

By LOLITA C. BALDOR  
AND TARA COPP

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Building lethality in the military may be the buzzword for the new Trump administration, but busywork and paperwork have become the reality at the Pentagon, as service members and civilian workers are facing a broad mandate to purge all of the department's social media sites and untangle confusing personnel reduction moves.

On Wednesday, the department's top public affairs official signed and sent out a new memo requiring all the military services to spend countless hours poring over years of website postings, photos, news articles and videos to remove any mentions that "promote diversity, equity and inclusion."

If they can't do that by March 5, they have been ordered to "temporarily remove from public display" all content published during the Biden administration's four years in office, according to a copy of the memo obtained by The Associated Press.

The new directive comes as the military services also are scrambling to identify probationary workers the administration has targeted for firing under its campaign to slash the government workforce.

They are also trying to figure out how many civilian workers have agreed to leave under the government-wide buyouts and whether they have been approved.

Among the firings were a dozen senior military leaders late last week, including Gen. CQ Brown Jr., who was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the chief of naval operations; Gen. Jim Slife, vice chief of the Air Force; and the judge advocates general for the services.

Top leaders had been targeted as part of the campaign to rid the military of so-called "woke" leaders, but the firing of the JAGs didn't seem to fall into that category.



AP

President Donald Trump listens during a Cabinet meeting at the White House in Washington, Wednesday.

ry.

The latest social media directive hits just days after the department issued a separate memo to the services reminding forces to remain apolitical and focused on "the non-partisan execution of their duties."

"Given the intense focus on recent changes within the department, maintaining the public trust is more important than ever," said the memo, signed Feb. 19 by Darin Selnick, who is temporarily working as the undersecretary for personnel.

The move to purge content on diversity is part of Trump's broader executive order ending the federal government's diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

But confusion has swirled among federal agencies, since Trump himself marked Black History Month at the White House with a reception that featured golf legend Tiger Woods.

U.S. officials said this week that

military leaders were initially told they would have just days to scour their websites going back decades for stories on gains in the military by women and minorities or stories celebrating cultural heritage. When the leaders said they didn't have the manpower to meet the deadline, they got the option to simply wipe away all posts from the last four years.

Employees would then go through all that content to determine what must be publicly removed and archived and what can be reposted.

But officials said that given the expanse of the task, many may just remove all content from the last four years and start over with new sites — essentially erasing the Biden tenure from the department's online history. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to relay internal discussions.

Signed by Sean Parnell, the department's new chief spokesman, the memo provides a bit more de-

tail on the DEI purge that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has ordered. But it also has left the services and department sections scrambling to find workers to devote substantial time to the detail-intensive task.

Officials said they are concerned that the directive has added yet another distraction as they try to focus on meeting Trump's broader mandate to increase lethality. They worry there is little time to strip years of old military web pages of all DEI content — and to do so means pulling staff from other more critical warfighting and security tasks.

It also isn't entirely clear what makes something "DEI-related."

According to the memo, it includes content that promotes programs or materials about critical race theory, gender ideology and special treatment for individuals based up gender, race or ethnicity. It also refers to any content that is counter to "merit-based or color-

blind policies" — which could include news items that focus on a service member or employee's race or gender.

And despite Trump's celebration of Black History Month, it also calls for the elimination of all content that promotes so-called cultural awareness months that Hegseth decried in an earlier memo titled "Identity Months dead at DOD."

In that Jan. 31 memo, he said that "efforts to divide the force — to put one group ahead of another — erode camaraderie and threaten mission execution." He has also argued that efforts to broader diversity took emphasis away from warfighting.

As a result, he said the department and the services can't use official resources to host celebrations or event related to Black History Month, Women's History Month, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Pride Month, National Hispanic Heritage Month, National Disability Employment Awareness Month and National American Indian Heritage Month.

Instead, he said units and offices "are encouraged to celebrate the valor and success of military heroes of all races, genders, and backgrounds as we restore our warrior culture and ethos."

The new edict raises questions about how workers will determine what to pull down. And it triggers fears that there could be another overreaction — as workers remove all photos or videos of women and minorities to ensure they don't miss something.

Such overreach caused problems early on following Trump's initial order to purge DEI from social media — the Air Force quickly took down new recruit training courses that included videos of the Tuskegee Airmen.

That mistake drew the White House's ire and left the service open to criticism that it was engaging in "malicious compliance." The Air Force quickly reversed the removal of the videos.

## Pentagon details transgender troop policy in court filing

By TARA COPP

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon revealed the specifics of its new transgender troop policy in a court filing Wednesday that says any service member or recruit who has been diagnosed with or treated for gender dysphoria is disqualified from serving — unless they can prove they meet a specific warfighting need and adhere to severe restrictions on their day-to-day behavior and medical care.

The policy memo was included

in the latest court filing in a lawsuit challenging President Donald Trump's executive order against transgender military service, one of many hot-button issues the president made a priority to address on his first days in office.

Like the executive order, the policy filed Wednesday suggests that the lethality and integrity of the military "is inconsistent" with what transgender personnel go through as they transition to the gender they identify with and issues an edict that gender is "immutable, unchanging during a

person's life."

The policy provides two exceptions — if transgender personnel who seek to enlist can prove on a case-by-case basis that they directly support warfighting activities or if an existing service member who was diagnosed with gender dysphoria can prove they support a specific warfighting need and never transitioned to the gender they identify with and prove over 36 months they are stable in their biological sex "without clinically significant distress."

If a waiver is issued in either

case, the applicant would still face a situation where only their biological sex was recognized for bathroom facilities, sleeping quarters and even in official recognition, such as being called "Sir" or "Ma'am."

Gender dysphoria occurs when a person's biological sex doesn't match with their gender identity.

While the number of transgender troops serving is small compared to the size of the total force, it's taken up a large amount of time and attention both at the White House and within the Pentagon.

The military services, due to medical privacy laws, do not provide an exact count of transgender troops, but a 2018 independent study by the Palm Center, which researched LGBTQ issues, assessed there were an estimated 14,000 transgender troops among the more than 2 million troops serving.

It was a policy Trump tried to overturn in his first term in office but the issue ended up mired in lawsuits until former President Joe Biden was elected and he overturned the ban.

## MILITARY

# Spouse firings spur worries about retention

BY LARA KORTE

Stars and Stripes

Emily Cormier says she'll never forget the moment she got the termination notice.

It was Feb. 13, and she was relaxing with her family in their Virginia home when she received a frantic call from her supervisor, telling her to check her email.

After scrambling to her laptop, she saw a message sent at 7:11 p.m. stating that she had lost her job at the Department of Veterans Affairs as a program assistant.

The email, reviewed by Stars and Stripes, cited her performance as a factor in the firing, though she had only been there for four months and hadn't yet had a review.

Cormier said she went numb. Her husband, an active-duty service member, was awaiting permanent change of station orders. They were months away from moving their family, including two young children, to a new town.

Cormier counted on her entry into the federal employment system to ease that transition.

Instead, the job that helped them afford car payments and day care — the job that she had hoped would provide stability amid the constant change of military life — was gone.

"I'd always viewed the federal government as 'this is where I needed to be,'" she said in an online interview. "That's changed now."

Cormier is among an unknown number of military spouses who have lost their jobs as part of reductions in the federal workforce. The cuts have dealt financial blows to the affected military spouses and their families, who often struggle to find the work they say is necessary to supplement service members' income.



ERIN WHITE

**Erin White, an Air Force veteran, was let go from her job at the Food and Drug Administration.**

The loss is likely to cause stress and hardship on members of the military, experts and advocates say, impacting readiness and, potentially, hurting retention numbers.

"When you don't have stable home situations and you're worrying about your spouse, you're worrying about spouse employment, you're worrying about income ... it impacts readiness, it impacts stability," said retired Lt. Gen. Brian Kelly, chief executive officer of the Military Officers Association of America. "The calculus for military service is: when the hardships and the difficulties outweigh the benefits, then retention suffers."

Job hunting is a chronic issue for military spouses, who face unemployment rates far higher than the general public — about 20% compared to the current national average of 4%. Last year, more than three-quarters of active-duty spouses reported that two incomes were vital for their families' well-being, according to a yearly survey of Blue Star Families, with 54% listing employment as their top concern.

Regular relocation makes it difficult to maintain steady work, particularly in the private sector, spouses say. One in four active-duty families experienced food insecurity in 2023, according to a survey from the Military Family Advisory Network. In some cases, spouses and their families choose to live apart from their service members in order to keep up a second income, a practice known as geo-batching.

Overseas stations present even more challenges, with U.S. and NATO country restrictions blocking spouses from the job market and resulting in thousands of military families living abroad on food stamps and low-income assistance.

Federal jobs, when they're available, can provide more stability — allowing husbands and wives of service members to stay at the same agency or department over the course of several moves.

The federal government for years offered a hiring preference for military spouses. In 2018, President Donald Trump signed an executive order seeking to provide greater opportunity for military spouses to be considered for federal competitive service positions.

Kelly, at MOAA, said he understands the goal of making the government more efficient, but said it's inevitable that the cuts will impact the military.

"You will have readiness immediately suffer because some people who are highly skilled and capable either aren't able to focus on their mission or don't retain," he said.

Emmalee Gruesen, a Virginia-based military spouse, helps run a Facebook group for fellow wives and husbands working in the federal government. She said the



EMILY CORMIER

**Emily Cormier was let go from her job at the Department of Veterans Affairs.**

group has seen a significant uptick in membership since the administration started cutting the workforce last month, and that many military families have been left struggling and seeking support.

"Certainly we are realizing how fragile many people's financial situation is," said Gruesen, who works for the Navy. "It doesn't matter if you're dual income, suddenly you are still paycheck to paycheck. We're hearing from people who are dipping into savings because, not knowing what will happen, they don't want to give up child care spots."

It's unclear exactly how many military spouses have lost their jobs in the last month following several executive orders and actions by the newly formed Department of Government Efficiency. In 2021, the Defense Department alone employed about 46,000 military spouses, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

Defense officials said last week they're planning to cut about 5,400 employees who are still in a probationary period, which is generally those who have been hired within

the last one to two years.

That included Erin White, an Air Force veteran who earlier this month was let go from her job at the Food and Drug Administration.

White, whose husband is also a retired veteran, joined the FDA's communications team after a stint working with the Navy. She had to serve a probationary period upon changing jobs.

On Feb. 15, she received her termination notice. As with other federal employees, the message cited poor work performance as the cause of separation, without offering specifics.

"Obviously we're taking a really big hit here," she said. "We're fortunate enough that we can make ends meet, but it's just not going to be comfortable. Hopefully I can find another job before we run out of savings."

There is some hope that the administration will take steps to lessen the blow to military families. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management last week issued a memo exempting military spouses who had been on remote work contracts from a return-to-office mandate.

Spouses and advocates, meanwhile, have been speaking out about their experiences, taking to social media and contacting members of Congress.

Maria Donnelly, another moderator in the federally employed spouses' Facebook page, said that, for some military families, relying on one income will be too much of a financial burden, and that some may leave the military to seek more flexibility and opportunities in the private sector.

"They are willing to serve," she said. "But if it becomes too expensive or becomes untenable, something's got to give."

## Firings: Senators say Trump has right to choose his own military team

FROM PAGE 1

Services Committee.

Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., compared the firings to the way President Barack Obama, a Democrat, shook up military leadership as he pursued military gains in Afghanistan. He said he was still trying to understand whether Trump's dismissals were really without precedent.

"I don't know if I should be concerned or not, if it's really far afield from what you normally see in transitions," Tillis said.

Fired alongside Brown were five other top officials: Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the first woman to lead the Navy; Gen. James Slife, the vice chief of the Air Force; and the top judge advocate generals, who advise the military on how to legally conduct their actions, for the

Army, the Navy and the Air Force.

But it was Brown's dismissal that attracted the most attention, given that Trump campaigned heavily on removing "woke" generals from the military. Brown rose to the job after a career as one of the Air Force's top aviators, but he drew conservative ire for speaking about his experiences as a Black man in the military after the murder of George Floyd, a Black man who was killed when a white Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee on Floyd's neck for about 9 1/2 minutes while Floyd was handcuffed.

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., lambasted Brown's firing. She said the message from the White House to rank-and-file troops is clear: "Your expertise and service is not what's important. What's

important is your political loyalty to Donald Trump."

Brown was only the second African American to serve as Joint Chiefs chairman, after the late Army Gen. Colin Powell. He was confirmed for the job in 2023 with significant bipartisan support, but few Republicans came to his defense after his firing.

Many Republicans emphasized that Trump has the right, as the commander-in-chief, to dismiss Brown.

"I think the president is entitled to have his team, including on the Joint Chiefs," said Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo.

"And I thought the president handled that well, thanked him for service and a distinguished career, but it's probably time for change."

Hawley did not specify why Brown had to be removed before his four-year tenure as chairman expired but said he expected Trump would provide some explanation.

Trump's firings did draw some pushback, if muted. A bipartisan group of House members sent a letter to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth calling for "clear, transparent and apolitical" criteria for the removal of top military officials.

"An apolitical military is an essential component of our democracy and our national security," wrote a group of six lawmakers that included Rep. Don Bacon, R-Nebr., alongside moderate Democrats.

And Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said Brown and the other

officers fired had been doing a "good job."

"It's the president's prerogative and I recognize that," Collins said. "But I do not think based on the merits that the decision to fire them was warranted."

Others cheered Trump's dismissals. Rep. Derrick Van Orden, R-Wis., a former Navy SEAL, slammed the Pentagon's leadership under President Joe Biden, a Democrat, saying "the folks from that era just need to go away."

"We need a clean slate at the DOD," Van Orden said.

Democratic senators say the firings are an ominous sign, given that Trump has long made clear his desire to involve the military in his domestic policy goals, including his crackdown on immigration.



# Democrats warn of DOGE access to intelligence

**BY DAVID KLEPPER**  
*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Democratic lawmakers are demanding answers from Elon Musk about whether staffers at his Department of Government Efficiency have shared national security secrets over insecure communication channels.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Rep. Gerry Connolly of Virginia were joined by several other Democrats on a letter Thursday that asserts that reckless actions by Musk and Republican President Donald Trump’s cost-cutting initiative present a threat to national security by exposing secrets about America’s defense and intelligence agencies.

Such information would present huge advantages to U.S. adversaries by giving them critical information about Washington’s defense priorities and the resources assigned to various missions and objectives, the lawmakers said.

Without going through the normal security procedures, staffers hired by Musk have gained access to a variety of sensitive government databases that contain private information about many Americans and their businesses, along with employment and operational information used by the government.

In many cases that includes classified information, such as the precise number of employees working for various intelligence agencies.

According to the letter, DOGE staffers in recent weeks have used unauthorized servers and unknown artificial intelligence programs to analyze and store the data, and shared the infor-

**According to the letter, DOGE staffers have used unauthorized servers and unknown artificial intelligence programs to analyze and store the data.**

mation over unsecure channels, raising the risk that a foreign nation, criminal group or inside threat could gain access or misuse the material.

The lawmakers also noted that despite assurances the DOGE website will not reveal information from intelligence agencies, material from the National Reconnaissance Office was easily found, the lawmakers said.

They expressed concerns that DOGE may be cutting spending and personnel without understanding the national security implications until it is too late.

They pointed to a recent incident in which the government tried to bring back workers it had fired who worked on nuclear weapon programs.

“DOGE employees do not appear to fully understand much of the information to which they have been given unfettered access and given the cavalier and incompetent ways that they have handled this data, these individuals represent a clear threat to national security and the nation’s economy,” the lawmakers wrote.

In their letter, the Democrats demanded information about DOGE staffing and security protocols and how the data has been used, and potentially misused, since DOGE began operations earlier this year.



Members of the American Legion pray Wednesday before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans’ Affairs committees in Washington.

## Veterans groups describe how firings are gutting VA

**BY LINDA F. HERSEY**  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The nation’s leading veterans advocacy groups condemned the purge of workers at the Department of Veterans Affairs and called on President Donald Trump’s administration to reinstate an estimated 6,000 veterans fired across the federal government.

Thousands of jobs at the VA have been lost as part of a new hiring freeze and layoffs across the agency that began two weeks ago, lawmakers said. The VA has not disclosed how many of those jobs were held by veterans, but American Legion representatives said Wednesday that the vast majority of the 470,000 workers at the VA are veterans.

“The state of veterans services is imperiled. We are watching the gutting of the Department of Veterans Affairs,” Navy veteran Lindsay Church, director of Minority Veterans of America, said Wednesday at the start of a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans’ Affairs committees.

The hearing was held for veterans service organizations to present their legislative priorities. But the

focus was on the firings and the impact on veterans who receive VA benefits and services as well as other veterans who lost jobs in workforce reductions that extend to agencies across the federal government.

“Veterans are being turned into collateral damage in a war of political posturing,” Church said about Trump’s directive to downsize the federal workforce.

“I have grave concerns about how Trump’s executive orders are being carried out across the federal government, most especially at the Department of Veterans Affairs,” said Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., who later implored Rep. Mike Bost, R-Ill., the committee chairman, to hold a hearing on the firings and its impact on veterans.

Following a contentious exchange, Bost said he will take it under advisement.

More than 2 million people work in federal government jobs. Veterans make up roughly 30% of that workforce. The percentage is higher at the VA. About 360,000 people in the VA’s workforce of 470,000 are veterans, said Cole T. Lyle, national director of veterans affairs and re-

## Trump tariffs affecting China, Mexico and Canada start next week

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump says he plans to impose tariffs on Canada and Mexico starting Tuesday, in addition to doubling the 10% universal tariff charged on imports from China.

Posting on Truth Social on Thursday, Trump said that illicit drugs such as fentanyl are being smuggled into the United States at “unacceptable levels” and that import taxes would force other

countries to crack down on the trafficking.

The prospect of escalating tariffs has already thrown the global economy into turmoil — with consumers expressing fears about inflation worsening and the auto sector possibly suffering if America’s two largest trading partners in Canada and Mexico are slapped with taxes.

But Trump has also at times engaged in aggressive posturing only to give last-minute reprieves,

previously agreeing to a 30-day suspension of the Canada and Mexico tariffs that were initially supposed to start in February.

Trump intends to put 25% tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada, with a lower 10% tax on Canadian energy products such as oil and electricity.

The move ostensibly about drug trafficking and immigration led both countries to respond by emphasizing their existing efforts to address these issues, in addi-

tion to Canada creating a fentanyl czar and Mexico deploying 10,000 members of its National Guard to its border with the United States.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said Thursday that she hoped to speak with Trump after the Cabinet-level meetings occurring in Washington this week.

The potential for higher prices and slower growth could create political blowback for Trump, who promised voters in last year’s

presidential election that he could quickly lower the inflation rate, which jumped during President Joe Biden’s term.

But Trump also campaigned on imposing broad tariffs and sweeping tariffs, which he plans to launch on April 2 by resetting tariffs to match the taxes that he determines are charged by other countries on American goods.

Trump indicated Wednesday that European countries would face a 25% tariff.



NATION

# Justices warm to straight woman's bias claim

**By MARK SHERMAN**  
*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court seemed likely Wednesday to side with an Ohio woman who claims she suffered sex discrimination from her employer because she is straight.

The outcome of the case could remove an additional requirement that some courts apply when members of a majority group, including those who are white and heterosexual, sue for discrimination under federal law.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh stated a way of resolving the case, that seemed to enjoy broad support among his colleagues.

“Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, whether you are gay or straight, is prohibited. The rules are the same whichever way it goes,” Kavanaugh said.

The justices heard arguments in an appeal from Marlean Ames, who has worked for the Ohio Department of Youth Services for more than 20 years.

Ames contends she was passed over for a promotion and then demoted because she is heterosexual. Both the job she sought and the one she had held were given to LGBTQ+ people.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 bars sex discrimination in the



MADDIE MCGARVEY/For The Washington Post

**Marlean Ames, shown outside her lawyer's office in Akron, Ohio, this month, has worked for the Ohio Department of Youth Services for more than 20 years.**

workplace. A trial court and the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against Ames.

The question for the justices is that the Cincinnati-based 6th Circuit and several other appeals courts covering 20 states and the

District of Columbia apply a higher standard when members of a majority group make discrimination claims. People alleging workplace bias have to show “background circumstances,” including that LGBTQ+ people made the deci-

sions affecting Ames or statistical evidence showing a pattern of discrimination against members of the majority group.

The appeals court noted that Ames didn't provide any such circumstances.

Ohio Solicitor General T. Elliot Gaiser told the justices that the officials who made the job decisions did not even know Ames' sexual orientation.

But even Gaiser didn't object too much to the narrow outcome that seemed most likely. “Everyone here agrees that everyone should be treated equally,” Gaiser said.

His concession prompted Justice Neil Gorsuch to note, “We're in radical agreement on that today.”

America First Legal and other conservative groups filed briefs arguing that members of majority groups are as likely to face job discrimination, if not more so, because of diversity, equity and inclusion policies.

President Donald Trump has ordered an end to DEI policies in the federal government and has sought to end government support for DEI programs elsewhere. Some of the new administration's anti-DEI initiatives have been temporarily blocked in federal court.

Lawyers for America First, founded by Trump aide Stephen Miller, wrote that the idea that discrimination against members of majority groups is rare “is highly suspect in this age of hiring based on ‘diversity, equity, and inclusion.’”

But there was no mention of DEI by the justices on Wednesday.

## EPA head urges Trump relook at finding that underpins climate regs, sources say

**By MATTHEW DALY**  
*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — In a potential landmark action, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency has privately urged the Trump administration to reconsider a scientific finding that has long been the central basis for U.S. action against climate change.

In a report to the White House, EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin called for a rewrite of the agency's finding that determined planet-warming greenhouse gases endanger public health and welfare, according to four people who were briefed on the matter but spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the recommendation is not public.

The 2009 finding under the Clean Air Act is the legal underpinning of a host of climate regulations for motor vehicles, power plants and other pollution sources.

A spokesperson for the EPA on Wednesday declined to reveal Zeldin's recommendation, which was made last week under an executive order from Republican President Donald Trump. The order, issued on Trump's first day in office, directed the EPA to submit a report “on the legality and continuing applicability” of the endan-

germent finding.

The Obama-era finding “is the linchpin of the federal government's policies for what the president and I call the climate hoax,” said Steve Milloy, a former Trump transition adviser who disputes mainstream science on climate change.



Zeldin

“If you pull this (finding) out, everything EPA does on climate goes away,” Milloy told the AP.

Trump, at a Cabinet meeting Wednesday, said Zeldin told him he is moving to eliminate about 65% of the EPA's workforce. “A lot of people that weren't doing their job, they were just obstructionist,” Trump said.

Myron Ebell, another former Trump transition adviser who has questioned the science behind climate change, said Wednesday he was “very excited” at Zeldin's apparent recommendation on endangerment.

“It's the basis of all the economically damaging rules to regulate carbon dioxide,” Ebell said, calling repeal “a hard step, but a very big step.”

Environmental groups and legal experts said any attempt to repeal or roll back the endangerment finding would be an uphill task with a slim chance of success.

“This would be a fool's errand,” said David Doniger, a climate expert at the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group. “In the face of overwhelming science, it's impossible to think that the EPA could develop a contradictory finding that would stand up in court.”

Trump, who has repeatedly denounced what he calls a “green new scam” pushed by Democrats and environmentalists, may view a repeal of the endangerment finding as a “kill shot” that would allow him to make all climate regulations invalid, Doniger said.

“But it's a real long shot for them,” he added, noting that courts repeatedly have upheld the EPA's authority to regulate pollution from greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act.

Ann Carlson, an environmental law professor at the UCLA School of Law, said any effort to overturn the endangerment finding would “raise more havoc — part of the administration's overall strategy to flood the zone” with chaotic actions and directives.

## Analysts: DOGE layoffs soon to show up in jobless report

*Associated Press*

Applications for U.S. jobless benefits rose to a three-month high last week but remained within the same healthy range of the past three years.

The number of Americans filing for jobless benefits rose by 22,000 to 242,000 for the week ending Feb. 22, the Labor Department said Thursday. Analysts projected that 220,000 new applications would be filed.

Weekly applications for jobless benefits are considered a proxy for layoffs.

The four-week average, which evened out some of the week-to-week volatility, climbed by 8,500 to 224,000.

Some analysts say they expect layoffs ordered by the Department of Government Efficiency to show up in the report in the coming weeks or months.

Joseph Brusuelas, chief economist at tax and advisory firm RSM, said he doesn't expect a “bursting of the pipes” in layoffs and unemployment — yet.

“For now it's more likely to be a steady drip, drip, drip in the pace of firings,” Brusuelas said.

On Wednesday, senior U.S. officials set the government downsizing in motion via a memo dramat-

ically expanding President Donald Trump's efforts to scale back a workforce. Thousands of probationary employees have already been fired, and now the Republican administration is turning its attention to career officials with civil service protection.

Government agencies have been directed to submit by March 13 their plans for what is known as a reduction in force, which would not only lay off employees but eliminate positions altogether.

Despite showing some signs of weakening during the past year, the labor market remains healthy with plentiful jobs and relatively few layoffs.

Earlier this month, the Labor Department reported that U.S. employers added 143,000 jobs in January, significantly fewer than December's 256,000 job gains. However, the unemployment rate ticked down to an even 4%, signaling a still very healthy labor market.

Late in January, the Federal Reserve left its benchmark lending rate alone after issuing three cuts late in 2024. Fed officials are closely monitoring inflation and the labor market for signs of a potentially weakening economy. They expect only two rate cuts this year, down from previous projections of four.



# Unvaccinated child dies from measles

By Devi Shastri  
And Amanda Seitz  
*Associated Press*

LUBBOCK, Texas — A child who wasn't vaccinated died in a measles outbreak in rural West Texas, state officials said Wednesday, the first U.S. death from the highly contagious—but preventable—respiratory disease since 2015.

The school-aged child had been hospitalized and died Tuesday night amid the widespread outbreak, Texas' largest in nearly 30 years. Since it began last month, a rash of 124 cases has erupted across nine counties.

The Texas Department of State Health Services and Lubbock health officials confirmed the death. The child wasn't identified but was treated at Covenant Children's Hospital in Lubbock, though the facility noted the patient didn't live in Lubbock County.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the nation's top health official and a vaccine critic, said Wednesday that the U.S. Department of the Health and Human Services is watching cases and dismissed the Texas outbreak as “not unusual.”

He appeared to misstate a number of facts, including a claim that most who had been hospitalized were there only for “quarantine.” Dr. Lara Johnson at Covenant contested that characterization.

“We don't hospitalize patients for quarantine purposes,” said Johnson, the chief medical officer.

Kennedy also seemed to mis-speak in saying two people had died of measles. A spokesman—Andrew Nixon, for the Department of Health and Human Services—later clarified that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified only one death.

The federal government is providing vaccines as well as technical and laboratory support in West Texas, but the state health department is leading the response, Nix-

on said.

The CDC has said it will provide only weekly updates on the measles outbreak and had not yet updated its public webpage to reflect the child's death.

Texas health department data shows that a majority of the reported measles cases are in children.

The virus has largely spread among rural, oil rig-dotted towns in West Texas, with cases concentrated in a “close-knit, undervaccinated” Mennonite community, state health department spokesperson Lara Anton said.

Gaines County, which has reported 80 cases so far, has a strong homeschooling and private school community.

It is also home to one of the highest rates of school-aged children in Texas who have opted out of at least one required vaccine, with nearly 14% skipping a required dose last school year.

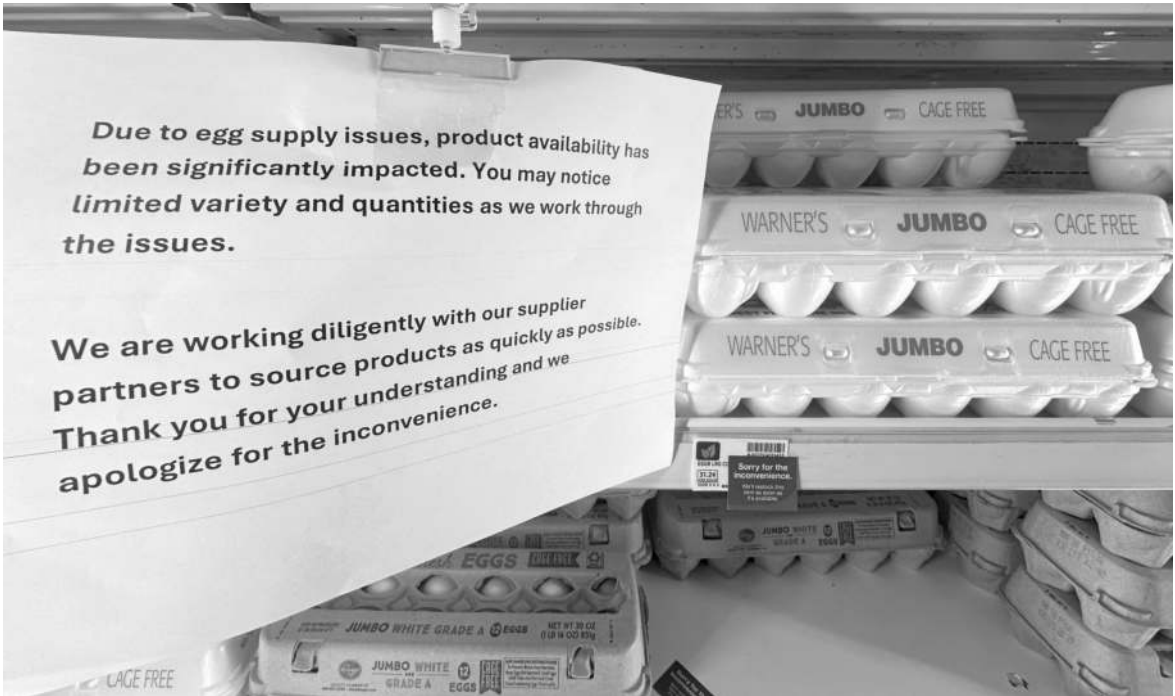
More than 20 measles patients have been hospitalized at Covenant, including the outbreak's first identified case, hospital officials said.

Some patients' respiratory issues progressed to bacterial pneumonia, and they needed an oxygen tube to breathe, Johnson told The Associated Press. Others had to be intubated.

The measles, mumps and rubella vaccine is safe and highly effective at preventing infection and severe cases. The vaccine series is required for kids before entering kindergarten in public schools nationwide.

Most kids will recover from measles, but infection can lead to dangerous complications such as pneumonia, blindness, brain swelling and death.

Vaccination rates have declined nationwide since the COVID-19 pandemic, and most states are below the 95% vaccination threshold for kindergartners—the level needed to protect communities against measles outbreaks.



PAUL SANCYA/AP

A sign at a grocery store in Grosse Pointe Woods, Mich., describes problems with egg supplies Feb. 14.

## USDA: Egg prices could jump 41% as Trump's bird flu plan unveiled

*Associated Press*  
WASHINGTON — The U.S. Agriculture Department predicts record egg prices could soar more than 40% in 2025, as the Trump administration offered the first new details Wednesday about its plan to battle bird flu and ease costs.

With an emphasis on farms tightening their measures to prevent bird flu's spread, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins said the USDA will invest another \$1 billion on top of the roughly \$2 billion it has already spent since the outbreak began in 2022.

The main reason egg prices have climbed—hitting an all-time average high of \$4.95 per dozen this month—is that more than 166 million birds have been slaughtered to limit the virus' spread when cases are found. Most were egg-laying chickens. Just since the start of the year, more than 30 million egg layers have been killed.

■ **What more can farmers do to stop bird flu?**

Egg and poultry farmers have already been working since the bird flu outbreak of 2015 to protect their birds by making workers

change clothes and shower before entering barns, using separate sets of tools and sanitizing any vehicles that enter farms.

The USDA has already done biosecurity reviews on about 150 farms and only one had an outbreak afterward, the USDA said, so officials believe more can be done to protect birds.

The government will help pay for up to 75% of the cost of the needed biosecurity improvements.

■ **Egg prices will get much worse this year.**

The USDA now predicts the cost of eggs will go up 41.1% this year. Just last month, the increase was predicted to be 20%.

And the average prices conceal just how bad the situation is, with consumers paying more than a dollar per egg—over \$12 a dozen—in some places.

Prices have more than doubled since before the outbreak began, costing consumers at least \$1.4 billion last year, according to an estimate by agricultural economists at the University of Arkansas.

Restaurants like Denny's and Waffle House started adding sur-

charges to egg dishes.

Egg prices also normally increase every spring heading into Easter when demand is high.

■ **Will the Trump plan bring down prices?**

Rollins acknowledged that it will take some time before consumers see an effect at the checkout counter. It takes infected farms months to dispose of the carcasses, sanitize their farms and raise new birds. But she expressed optimism that the plan will help prices.

■ **Where's the money going?**

The plan calls for \$500 million investment to help farmers bolster biosecurity measures, \$400 million in additional aid for farmers whose flocks have been impacted by avian flu, \$100 million to research and potentially develop vaccines and therapeutics for U.S. chicken flocks and explore rolling back what the administration sees as restrictive animal welfare rules in some states like California's cage-free requirement approved by voters.

The USDA has already paid farmers roughly \$1.2 billion for the birds they had to slaughter.

## US Christian population levels off after years of decline

*Associated Press*  
WASHINGTON — The number of Americans who identify as Christian has declined steadily for years, but that drop shows signs of slowing, according to a new survey Wednesday from the Pew Research Center.

The Religious Landscape Study finds 62% of U.S. adults call themselves Christians. While a significant dip from 2007, when 78% of Americans identified as Christian, Pew found the Christian share of

the population has remained relatively stable since 2019.

The rapid rise of the religiously unaffiliated—the so-called “nones”—has also reached at least a temporary plateau, according to Pew. Approximately 29% of U.S. adults identify as religiously unaffiliated, including those who are atheist (5%), agnostic (6%) or “nothing in particular” (19%).

“It's striking to have observed this recent period of stability in American religion after that long

period of decline,” said Pew's Gregory Smith, one of the study's co-authors. “One thing we can't know for sure is whether these short-term signs of stabilization will prove to be a lasting change in the country's religious trajectory.”

By some measures, the U.S. remains overwhelmingly spiritual. Many Americans have a supernatural outlook, with 83% believing in God or a universal spirit and 86% believing that people have a soul or spirit.

Despite this widespread spirituality, there are harbingers of future religious decline. Most notably, Pew found a huge age gap, with 46% of the youngest American adults identifying as Christian, compared to 80% of the oldest adults. The youngest adults are also three times more likely than the oldest group to be religiously unaffiliated.

“These kinds of generational differences are a big part of what's driven the long-term declines in

American religion,” Smith said. “As older cohorts of highly religious, older people have passed away, they have been replaced by new cohorts of young adults who are less religious than their parents and grandparents.”

Smith said “something would need to change” to stop the long-term decline of American religion, whether that's adults becoming more religious with age or new generations becoming more religious than their parents.



NATION

# Navy secretary pick touts his business acumen

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — John Phelan, a businessman with no military experience, said Thursday that he would use his background in the private sector to “step outside the status quo” if he is confirmed as the next secretary of the Navy.

Phelan, 61, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he understood why some might question why a businessman who never wore a military uniform would want to lead the Navy and he respected those concerns.

But he said he wanted to apply his management and leadership experience in investment firms to solve systemic failures that had long plagued the Navy and Marine Corps.

“The Navy and the Marine Corps already possess extraordinary operational expertise within their ranks,” he said during his confirmation hearing. “My role is to utilize that expertise and strengthen it, to step outside the status quo, to take decisive action with a results-oriented approach.”

If confirmed, Phelan would be the first person in more than 15 years to lead the Navy without having served in any branch of the military. The most recent Navy secretary, Carlos Del Toro, was a retired Navy officer who served for more than 20 years.

Phelan is the founder of several investment firms and serves on the board of Spirit of America, a nonprofit that works with troops



ERIC KAYNE/Stars and Stripes

**John Phelan, right, who is nominated to be the next Navy secretary, greets Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa., on Thursday, before his confirmation hearing with the Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington.**

and diplomats. He was also a major donor to the 2024 re-election campaign of President Donald Trump, who said Phelan would “put the business of the U.S. Navy above all else.”

Phelan said he intended to focus his efforts as Navy secretary on shipbuilding, recruiting and passing a department-wide audit. The position is responsible for overseeing more than 900,000 people and an annual budget of more than \$200 billion.

Senators on Thursday focused much of their questioning on the Navy’s troubled shipbuilding programs, nearly all of which have been wracked by delays for years and are consistently over budget.

Phelan said he believed the Navy was not acting urgently enough

to address the issue and appeared to suffer from a culture of complacency.

China, considered America’s top military competitor, is rapidly growing its fleet and is on pace to surpass 400 ships this year. The U.S. Navy was supposed to have a fleet of 315 ships by 2025 but only has 287.

“It’s almost as if we’re waiting for a crisis to happen to ignite things and I think in the business of warfare, that’s a dangerous place to be,” Phelan said. “I would bring a sense of urgency to this. I would bring a sense of accountability to this.”

Phelan said he could not comment on the Pentagon’s plans to drastically reduce its civilian workforce, potentially by more

than 70,000 people, but committed to sitting down with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to ensure shipyards would not be negatively impacted.

When pressed by several Democratic senators about the planned firings, Phelan said he did not know enough about them to say if he supported the cuts or not.

He expressed interest in growing the Navy’s enlisted ranks, however, and said he would use the service’s 250th anniversary this year to showcase the benefits of service.

The Navy is on track to meet its recruiting goals for a second straight year but has also loosened requirements, accepting recruits with lower test scores and those who did not have high school diplomas or a GED diploma or certificate.

Phelan said it was “critical” to have high standards. He said he

wanted to learn from the Marine Corps, which has not struggled with recruiting like the Navy and has built a recognizable brand by working with the same advertising agency for 30 years.

“The Marines put some of their best leadership in the recruiting role and that’s one of the reasons why they do so well with it,” he said. “So I’m going to try to adapt some of the best practices we get from other services and from my business experience in how to attract and retain talent.”

Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the Republican chairman of the committee, said Phelan’s nontraditional background was sorely needed in the Navy.

“I’m pleased with the nominee’s track record,” Wicker said. “He has rescued companies in distress. Our Navy is certainly in distress and we need that same kind of leadership.”

## Musk has inside track to take over contract to fix US air traffic system

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A satellite company owned by Elon Musk has the inside track to potentially take over a large federal contract to modernize the nation’s air traffic communications system.

Equipment from Musk’s Starlink has been installed in Federal Aviation Administration facilities as a prelude to a takeover of a \$2 billion contract held by Verizon, according to government employees, contractors and people familiar with the work.

Musk said that the network used by air traffic controllers is aging and requires drastic and quick action to modernize it.

“The Verizon system is not working and so is putting air travelers at serious risk,” Musk on Monday posted on X, the social media site he has owned since 2022.

The emergence of Starlink as a potential replacement for the Verizon-led effort underscores the

extraordinary conflicts of interest inherent in Musk’s position as both a senior White House adviser to President Donald Trump and a business mogul in charge of a sprawling array of companies. It is not clear what role Musk might be playing in helping Starlink parent company SpaceX win such business.

“There’s very limited transparency,” said Jessica Tillipman, a contracting law expert at George Washington University. Referring to Musk, she said: “Without that transparency, we have no idea how much non-public information he has access to or what role he’s playing in what contracts are being awarded.”

Former FAA officials also told The Associated Press that they were alarmed at the prospect of Starlink being used as a critical part of the nation’s aviation system without adequate testing, review and debate about its benefits and drawbacks.

SpaceX is angling to use its constellation of satellites to replace an aging ground-based communications system that facilitates the FAA’s text and voice communication, the sources said. The Verizon contract, awarded in 2023, was to update part of that system to a more modern standard relying on fiber optic cables.

Contracting records show that nearly \$200 million in work has already been done on Verizon’s 15-year modernization effort to update the FAA’s communications system. A Verizon representative said the company is unaware that the contract is being amended or terminated.

The FAA announced on X on Monday that the agency is testing a Starlink terminal at its facility in Atlantic City, N.J., and two terminals at “non-safety critical sites” in Alaska. Terminals are ground-based receivers that connect devices or computers to orbiting satellites.

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WORLD

Official: Israeli army won't withdraw from Gaza corridor

*Associated Press*

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip — Israel will not withdraw from a strategic corridor in the Gaza Strip as called for by the ceasefire, an official said Thursday. Israel's refusal could spark a crisis with Hamas and key mediator Egypt at a sensitive moment for the fragile truce.

Hours earlier, Hamas released the remains of four hostages in exchange for over 600 Palestinian prisoners, the last planned swap of the ceasefire's first phase, which ends this weekend.

Talks over the second, and significantly more difficult, stage have yet to begin.

Much could hinge on a visit by President Donald Trump's Mid-

east envoy, Steve Witkoff, who is expected in the region in the coming days.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meanwhile said in a brief statement that he was sending negotiators to Cairo, without providing further details.

The Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said the army needed to remain in the so-called Philadelphi corridor, on the Gaza side of the border with Egypt, to prevent weapons smuggling.

Separately, Defense Minister Israel Katz said at a meeting with local leaders that he had seen tunnels penetrating the border on a recent visit to the corridor, without providing evidence or elabo-

rating on Israel's plans.

Egypt says it destroyed the smuggling tunnels from its side of the border years ago and set up a military buffer zone to halt smuggling.

Hamas said any Israeli attempt to maintain a buffer zone in the corridor would be a "blatant violation" of the ceasefire agreement. The militant group says that sticking to the agreement is the only way for Israel to secure the release of dozens of hostages still held in Gaza.

Israel is supposed to begin withdrawing from the Philadelphi corridor on Saturday, the last day of the first phase, and complete it within eight days. There was no immediate comment from Egypt,

which is opposed to any Israeli presence on the Gaza side of its border.

The remains released Thursday were confirmed to be those of Ohad Yahalomi, Itzhak Elgarat, Shlomo Mantzur and Tsachi Idan, according to the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, which represents families of the captives.

Mantzur, 85, was killed in Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war, and his body was taken into the territory. Israel said the other three were killed in captivity, without elaborating.

"Our hearts ache upon receiving the bitter news," Israeli President Isaac Herzog said. "In this painful moment, there is some sol-

ace in knowing that they will be laid to rest in dignity in Israel."

Hamas confirmed that over 600 prisoners had been released overnight. Most were detainees returned to Gaza, where they had been rounded up after the Oct. 7 attack and held without charge.

The latest handover was the final one planned under the ceasefire's first six-week phase, which expires this weekend. Hamas has returned 33 hostages in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners.

Trump's envoy, Witkoff, has said he wants the sides to move into negotiations on the second phase.

Those talks were supposed to begin the first week of February.

Scores killed, injured after explosions at M23 rebel rally

*Associated Press*

BUKAVU, Congo — At least 11 people were killed and scores injured Thursday when explosions in the eastern Congo city of Bukavu struck a rally held by leaders of the M23 rebel group, which took control of the city earlier this month.

Rebel leaders blamed the bombing on Congo's government and said attackers were among those killed in the blasts, with conflicting reports among rebels and local officials about the number of attackers and victims.

Congo's president blamed the attack on unspecified "foreign" forces.

"The attack caused 11 deaths and verifications are underway. The author of the attack is among

the victims," Corneille Nangaa, leader of the Congo River Alliance (AFC), which includes the M23, told reporters. "There are 65 injured, six of whom are seriously injured and are currently being treated in the operating room."

He said that "following today's unfortunate incident, we are obliged to react."

Leaders of the M23 rebel group, including Nangaa, were meeting residents when the explosions occurred in the central part of Bukavu. Video and photos shared on social media showed a crowd fleeing the mass rally in Bukavu and bloodied bodies on the ground.

M23 accused the Congolese authorities of orchestrating the attack.

Congo's President Felix Tshise-

kedi called the attack "a heinous terrorist act that was perpetrated by a foreign army illegally present on Congolese soil."

The rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to U.N. experts, and at times have vowed to march as far as Congo's capital, Kinshasa, over 1,000 miles away.

Jean Samy, deputy president of the civil society Forces Vives of South Kivu, told The Associated Press that the attack was "a sabotage."

Nangaa was among leaders leaving the podium when two blasts rocked the scene, according to a journalist present at the rally. Nangaa had earlier told the rally that M23 was bringing "change and development" to their city.



JANVIER BARHAHIGA/AP

People assist victims after two explosions hit a meeting of M23 rebel group leaders and residents in Bukavu, eastern Congo, Thursday.

Mobile

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ENTERTAINMENT

# Still up for grabs

5 Academy Awards races (other than best picture) that feel impossible to predict

By GLENN WHIPP  
*Los Angeles Times*

The Oscar race for best picture has been a roller-coaster ride all season and, even with “Anora” winning the top prize from both the producers and directors guilds, there still might be a moment of suspense when that final envelope is opened at the March 2 ceremony. It has been that kind of year.

But best picture isn’t the only category that feels a bit up for grabs. After a 2024 show in which most of the winners seemed like foregone conclusions — “Oppenheimer” and its men, Cillian Murphy and Robert Downey Jr., and Da’Vine Joy Randolph for “The Holdovers” — we have a number of races that feel like they could go one way or another.

So let’s put aside the best picture drama for now and focus on where we are in five other categories that could end up surprising us at this year’s Academy Awards.

### Lead actor: Timothée Chalamet or Adrien Brody?

Chalamet won’t turn 30 until the end of the year. If he won for “A Complete Unknown,” he’d be the youngest to take the lead actor trophy. Who currently holds that distinction? None other than Brody, who won for “The Pianist” in 2003, 22 days before his 30th birthday.

“The Brutalist” earned 10 nominations, while “A Complete Unknown” scored eight. Popularity is not a problem for either of these movies. Chalamet has the biopic bias on his side (no, Brody’s László Tóth is not a real architect, though I hear he crossed paths with Lydia Tár in a past life), did all his own singing and expressed an earnest appreciation for the work of Bob Dylan, and the legend has returned the favor. As mentioned, Brody already has his Oscar, and not everyone was happy with the way he accepted it. (To quote Halle Berry: “I was like, ‘What the f— is happening?’”)

But ... Chalamet still feels a little like Leonardo DiCaprio in the 2000s, when he was king of the world, pulling in nominations for such films as “The Aviator,” “Blood Diamond” and “The Wolf of Wall Street” but coming up short before finally winning for “The Revenant.” The academy tends to make actors pay their dues, and we still might be a bit early in that phase of Chalamet’s career.

### Lead actress: Demi Moore or Fernanda Torres?

Back when we were talking about the ridiculous number of women deserving a lead actress nomination this year, many people figured it’d be tough for either Moore or Torres to make the final five. And now here we are, with Torres nominated and Moore favored to win for her raw, vulnerable turn in “The Substance” and as a way of honoring her career, perseverance and staying power.

Moore’s narrative came into focus the night she won the Golden Globe when she recognized the moment and gave a speech — one that she had memorized — that was both gracious and inspiring. She wrapped it up, beaming, “I do belong.”

“Good luck to the next person,” presenter Kerry Washington said immediately afterward.

Suddenly, all the doubts about “The Substance” being too outré for Oscar voters went up in smoke. And if you needed further proof, the academy gave Coralie Fargeat’s body-horror film a total of five nominations, including best picture, director, original screenplay and makeup and hairstyling.

But “The Substance” wasn’t the only movie that performed beyond expectations on nominations morning. “I’m Still Here,” starring Torres as a defiant woman holding her family together after a repressive regi-



Searchlight Pictures

Timothée Chalamet, right, has a chance to become the youngest lead actor winner for “A Complete Unknown.”



Searchlight Pictures

Kieran Culkin, right, seems a lock for best supporting actor, but will “A Real Pain” get best original screenplay?



Sony Pictures Classics

Fernanda Torres of “I’m Still Here,” a darling of international voters, is a dark-horse candidate for lead actress.



Netflix

The best picture odds for “Emilia Pérez,” starring Karla Sofia Gascón, seem bleak, but perhaps the most-nominated film can still lay claim to best international feature.

me takes her husband away, earned nominations for its lead as well as best picture and international feature. And since then, viewership for the late-arriving film has soared, continuing the momentum that began when Torres won at the Golden Globes. (Moore won for comedy; Torres, drama.)

Torres also has passionate support from the academy’s international voters, a bloc that has become increasingly important the past few years, along with a frenzied online backing from fans in her home country, Brazil. Torres did miss a few key precursors, including BAFTA and SAG. Plus, only two women have won this Oscar for a non-English-language turn — Sophia Loren (“Two Women”) and Marion Cotillard (“La Vie en Rose”). So while Torres has a chance, she remains a long shot. And who knows? If “Anora” sweeps, Mikey Madison could join the fun.

### Original screenplay: ‘The Brutalist,’ ‘Anora,’ ‘A Real Pain’ or ‘The Substance’?

Sean Baker earned Oscar nominations for writing, directing, producing and editing “Anora.” After winning the DGA, he’s now the clear pick for director. And with the PGA win, “Anora” is the favorite for best picture. Could he win a third Oscar for the screenplay? Or a fourth for film editing and, in the process, tie Walt Disney’s record for most Oscars won in a single year? In this topsy-turvy awards season, nothing feels impossible.

Jesse Eisenberg’s “A Real Pain,” with its deft balance of humor and melodrama, was an early favorite to win here, but missing a best picture nomination has made that proposition iffy. Still, it is a dialogue-heavy film with lots of terrific verbal sparring between Eisenberg and co-star Kieran Culkin, so I wouldn’t dismiss its chances entirely.

And if voters are doubling down on originality, both the bonkers horror of “The Substance” and the epic ambitions of “The Brutalist” offer options. Not better than “Anora,” but the vote for unorthodox indie movies figures to be splintered.

### Animated feature: ‘Flow’ or ‘The Wild Robot’?

“The Wild Robot” earned rapturous reviews when it premiered at the Toronto Film Festival last year and did well enough at the box office, earning more than \$300 million worldwide. In addition to animated feature, it also picked up nominations for sound and original score. And it dominated the Annie Awards, winning nine prizes, including best feature.

But “Flow,” co-written and directed by Latvian filmmaker Gints Zilbalodis, can’t be completely dismissed. It scored multiple nods too, landing in international feature as well as animated. So, again, we’re circling back to the academy’s international membership, a group likely to get behind Zilbalodis’ moving, wordless film. Maybe the academy’s cat-loving demographic can engineer an upset?

### International feature: ‘Emilia Pérez’ or ‘I’m Still Here’?

In the wake of “Emilia Pérez” lead Karla Sofia Gascón’s controversial social media posts and rogue media appearances, some have wondered if Oscar voters will shun the film despite its leading 13 nominations. That seems a little extreme. It’s likely “Emilia Pérez” will still win the categories it was likely to take before the backlash, including international feature. But if voters are looking for an alternative, they have one in “I’m Still Here,” which, like “Emilia Pérez,” was nominated for best picture. And, as a bonus for voters who like to make a statement with their ballots, “I’m Still Here” is also a potent indictment of authoritarianism, something on many people’s minds these days.



# ENTERTAINMENT



Focus Features

Ralph Fiennes stars as Cardinal Lawrence in director Edward Berger’s “Conclave,” which is nominated for best picture. Associated Press writers Jake Coyle and Lindsey Bahr are divided on whether it will be able to win against the “masterpiece” of “Anora.”

# Academy Awards ambivalence

AP Film Writers Bahr and Coyle share their predictions for an Oscars with much potential drama, many possible outcomes

By JAKE COYLE AND LINDSEY BAHR  
Associated Press

### Best picture

**THE NOMINEES:** “Anora,” “The Brutalist,” “A Complete Unknown,” “Conclave,” “Dune: Part Two,” “Emilia Pérez,” “I’m Still Here,” “Nickel Boys,” “The Substance,” “Wicked”

**COYLE:** Like any diagnosis this flu season, there are a lot of options. It would seem to be down to either “Anora” (Producers Guild Awards, Directors Guild of America Awards and Writers Guild Award wins) or “Conclave” (British Academy Film Awards, Screen Actors Guild Awards), but it’s close enough that a shocker is in the realm of possibility. The film industry is in a strange, mixed-up place and we have had a strange, mixed-up awards season to suit it. Ultimately, I think Sean Baker’s “Anora” wins. I trust the top prizes from the BAFTAs and SAGs less than the Producers Guild — especially when the PGA opts for a scrappy indie over glossier studio productions. Plus, “Conclave” is a nice little movie, but best picture? Not to get my vestments in a twist, but come on, “Anora” is a masterpiece.

**BAHR:** I kind of want to say “Conclave” just to hedge our bets. Maybe I’ll talk myself into it by the end of this, but its recent wins over “Anora” do make a certain amount of sense (in retrospect) for those particular voting bodies — actors and, well, Brits. It’s also the establishment choice in many ways, but one that also feels aligned with the very international membership of the academy. I agree that “Anora” is a masterpiece, but maybe “Conclave” is the consensus — everyone’s second choice.



Neon

Mark Eydelshteyn, left, and Mikey Madison in a scene from best-picture nominee “Anora”; Madison is in the running for best actress.

### Best actress

**THE NOMINEES:** Demi Moore, “The Substance”; Cynthia Erivo, “Wicked”; Mikey Madison, “Anora”; Karla Sofía Gascón, “Emilia Pérez”; Fernanda Torres, “I’m Still Here”

**BAHR:** This race feels so up in the air after Mikey Madison’s BAFTA win and “Anora’s” rise in general. Madison gave such a great and thoughtful speech there, praising her collaborators with the kind of specificity that doesn’t often happen on those stages, and it occurred



Moore

before Oscar voting had ended. There’s even the possibility that Fernanda Torres ekes out a win. But I’m still leaning toward Demi Moore, who won at SAG, as the sentimental favorite — a fun, wild performance and a great comeback narrative. Plus, this award hasn’t really gone to an ingenue since Emma Stone’s “La La Land” win.

**COYLE:** This should be close, but I also give the edge to Moore. She’s taken the lead thanks to the fearlessness of her performance in “The Substance” and arguably the season’s most convincing narrative. Still, I’d favor Madison, who absolutely commands “Anora.”

**Best actor**

**THE NOMINEES:** Adrien Brody, “The Brutalist”; Timothée Chalamet, “A Complete Unknown”; Colman Domingo, “Sing Sing”; Ralph Fiennes, “Conclave”; Sebastian Stan, “The Apprentice”

**COYLE:** Brody had been on cruise control for much of the season, but I think Chalamet takes it. Even before his big victory at the SAG Awards, the academy’s fondness for the widely liked “A Complete Unknown” needed somewhere to go. This Oscars could end up best remembered as the (deserving) coronation of Hollywood’s crown prince.

**SEE OSCARS ON PAGE 15**



Chalamet



Brody



ENTERTAINMENT

Oscars: Writers are confident in the winners of categories like supporting actor, actress

FROM PAGE 14

**BAHR:** Oh great, because I'm sticking with Brody. I'm glad Chalamet won at SAG; it makes sense that his fellow actors would want to honor his commitment to that role and film. Five years in your 20s IS forever, and it would be very neat for him to win at the same age Brody did for "The Pianist" (and in fact become the youngest winner ever). But considering the academy is a voting body that doesn't often give this prize to young men, I think they go with the classic choice.

Best supporting actress

**THE NOMINEES:** Monica Barbaro, "A Complete Unknown"; Felicity Jones, "The Brutalist"; Ariana Grande, "Wicked"; Isabella Rossellini, "Conclave"; Zoe Saldña, "Emilia Pérez"

**BAHR:** Zoe Saldña seems to have this prize in the bag. She has continued winning major awards, the BAFTA and SAG included, despite the "Emilia Pérez" dustup. Like Moore, she has a strong narrative working in her favor and has given good, passionate speeches throughout, and people seem savvy enough to not "punish" her for her co-star's actions. It does seem a little unfair considering the fact that her character has more screen time than the person campaigning for lead. But that's a conversation for another time.

**COYLE:** Saldña is a lock. She's terrific in "Emilia Pérez," and manages to stay so grounded and natural amid such tonal extremes. A word also for Grande and her best actress nominee co-star Erivo. Neither seems destined to win anything, but they both deserve some kind of accolade for their tireless promotion of "Wicked" and months of patient, understanding head nodding at whatever has been thrown their way.

Best supporting actor

**THE NOMINEES:** Yura Borisov, "Anora"; Kieran Culkin, "A Real Pain"; Edward Norton, "A Complete Unknown"; Guy Pearce, "The Brutalist"; Jeremy Strong, "The Apprentice"

**COYLE:** Culkin wins this in a

walk. His parade of acceptance speeches has curiously been both a regular reminder that his character in "A Real Pain" wasn't exactly a stretch, and: So what? As good as this category is — the whole group is stellar — Culkin has won it through his natural manic charisma.

**BAHR:** It's Culkin for sure, and I'm very excited for his free-wheeling speech. Is this a good time to wonder why awards campaigns tend to get so tunnel-visioned around one performance at the complete exclusion of their counterpart? Probably not, but I see you, Jesse Eisenberg and Margaret Qualley.

Best director

**THE NOMINEES:** Jacques Audiard, "Emilia Pérez"; Sean Baker, "Anora"; Brady Corbet, "The Brutalist"; James Mangold, "A Complete Unknown"; Coralie Fargeat, "The Substance"

**BAHR:** Sean Baker is the most likely winner here after the Directors Guild of America Awards. But it has happened that the DGA winner does not go on to win the Oscar, and as recently as 2020 when Sam Mendes lost the Oscar to Bong Joon-ho. But "Anora" is perhaps closer to "Parasite," both Palme d'Or winners, and I'm not sure there's an obvious second choice in this batch. If Baker isn't the pick, all seem like fair game.

**COYLE:** I think Baker will win, too, though there's a chance Corbet catches him. All of these nominees are first-timers, a nice infusion of fresh blood in a category often presided over by the old guard. A shame, then, that neither of the two most thrilling feature filmmaking debuts — RaMell Ross ("Nickel Boys") and Payal Kapadia ("All We Imagine as Light") — made the cut.

Best documentary

**THE NOMINEES:** "Black Box Diaries"; "No Other Land"; "Porcelain War"; "Soundtrack to a Coup d'Etat"; "Sugarcane"

**COYLE:** This is a tough category partly because most of my favorite docs of 2024 — "Ernest Cole: Lost and Found," "Will & Harper," "Dahomey," "Daughters" — weren't nominated. The Oscar will likely either go to "No Other Land," the searing on-the-ground chronicle of Israeli occupation in the West Bank, or "Porcelain War," a defiant portrait of keeping art and Ukrainian cul-



A24/AP

Adrien Brody, left, and Felicity Jones star in "The Brutalist." Both actors and the film are up for Oscars.

ture alive in the midst of war. My hunch is that "Porcelain War" wins, making it the second consecutive Ukraine dispatch to win, and a potentially poignant moment given recent policy shifts by President Donald Trump on Ukraine.

**BAHR:** This is impossible, and I would really like to hear what "Sugarcane" co-director Julian Brave NoiseCat says from the Oscar stage, but I'm going to go with "No Other Land." In addition to being a great film, it's stayed top of mind and in the conversation despite not having a distributor.

Best international film

**THE NOMINEES:** "I'm Still Here," Brazil; "The Girl with the Needle," Denmark; "Emilia Pérez," France; "The Seed of the Sacred Fig," Germany; "Flow," Latvia

**BAHR:** The International category is especially difficult to predict this year. "Emilia Pérez's" best picture campaign may have flatlined, but it still won the BAFTA in the same category where it was up against two of the same contenders ("I'm Still Here" and "The Seed of the Sacred Fig"). "I'm Still Here" is its toughest competition, though it's hard to count "Flow" out either. In the end, I think it may still swing "Emilia Pérez."

**COYLE:** What was once a cakewalk for "Emilia Pérez" has turned into a genuine nail-biter. I think "I'm Still Here" wins it, thanks not just to the collapse of "Emilia Pérez" but the ascendance of Walter Salles' timely tale of political courage. It's a worthy winner, though I would love to see exiled Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof cheered for "The Seed of the Sacred Fig," the year's most courageous cinematic accomplishment.



DREAMWORKS, UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

Roz, voiced by Lupita Nyong'o, and Brightbill, voiced by Kit Connor, in "The Wild Robot," Jake Coyle's pick for best animated film.



SIDESHOW/Janus Films

The wordless stars of "Flow" include a cat and a golden retriever. "Flow" is nominated in two categories, best international film and best animated film, and is Lindsey Bahr's pick to win the latter.

Best animated film

**THE NOMINEES:** "Flow"; "Inside Out 2"; "Moiré of a Snail"; "Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl"; "The Wild Robot"

**COYLE:** As much as I'd like to pick "Flow," the gorgeous ecological parable about a cat in a watery world, "The Wild Robot" is going to win. Stiff as the competition is, Chris Sanders' movie swept the Annie Awards and is

the consensus favorite. And since I, seemingly alone, found it too cloyingly manipulative to be genuinely moving, it also convinced me I have no heart. So a double win for "The Wild Robot."

**BAHR:** I'll pick "Flow"! In the grand tradition of the film significant enough to be nominated in two major categories, this seems like the place it'll win, unless Feathers McGraw has anything to say about it.



## MUSIC

## APPRECIATION



AP

Roberta Flack holds the record of the year award for “Killing Me Softly With His Song” as singer Isaac Hayes, right, looks on at the Grammy Awards in Los Angeles on March 4, 1974. It was Flack’s second consecutive Grammy for record of the year — making her the first to achieve the feat — after “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face” in 1973.

# Remembering Roberta Flack

Check out these 8 timeless hits that reveal an intimate stylist, unrivaled talent

BY MARIA SHERMAN  
Associated Press

In an era where popular music is fluid, it is easy to forget the listening world was not always so open. Unless, of course, Roberta Flack’s career is closely examined.

Flack, whose intimate vocal and musical style made her one of the top recording artists of the 1970s and an influential performer long after, died Monday at 88.

She leaves behind a rich repertoire of music that avoids categorization. Her debut album, “First Take,” wove soul, jazz, flamenco, gospel and folk into one revelatory package, prescient in its form and measured in its approach.

Flack will likely be remembered for her

classics — “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face” and “Killing Me Softly With His Song” among them. As she should be. But her talents extend well beyond the familiar titles. Here are eight songs that show Flack’s extraordinary range.

## ‘Hey, That’s No Way to Say Goodbye,’ 1969

Picking one standout from “First Take” is a fool’s errand, but listeners would be wise to spend time with Flack’s cover of the Leonard Cohen classic “Hey, That’s No Way to Say Goodbye,” a strong case for a reimagination eclipsing the original. Her voice transforms Cohen’s lament. It’s almost impossible to believe this song, let alone the entire record, was recorded over

a period of just 10 hours at Atlantic Studios in New York in February 1969. But it was.

## ‘Angelitos Negros,’ 1969

Also from “First Take” is “Angelitos Negros,” performed entirely in Spanish by Flack. It’s a song based on a poem by the Venezuelan writer Andrés Bello titled “Píntame Angelitos Negros,” with a title lifted from the 1948 Mexican film of the same name.

The movie navigates interracial relationships when a white couple gives birth to a dark-skinned child. Beyond Flack’s soaring vocal performance — delivered atop a robust string section and nylon-string guitars — the song serves as an anthem against racial discrimination and

a stunning example of the singer’s cross-boundary approach to music making.

## ‘The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face,’ 1972

As the well-documented lore suggests, Roberta Flack’s mainstream success story begins when her dreamy cover of “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face,” written by English folk artist Ewan MacColl for his wife Peggy Seeger, was used in a love scene between Clint Eastwood and Donna Mills in his 1971 film “Play Misty for Me.”

It quickly topped the Billboard pop chart in 1972 and received a Grammy for record of the year. But her relationship

SEE FLACK ON PAGE 17



# MUSIC REVIEWS

## Flack: Artist kept up with changes in musical trends

FROM PAGE 16

with the song, and her singular ability to bring it to such great heights, was almost kismet. Before recording the ballad, she had real familiarity with it, having taught it while working with a glee club during her years as an educator.

### ‘Killing Me Softly with His Song,’ 1973

It is Flack’s best-known hit and one of the great love songs of the 20th century. She first heard Lori Lieberman’s “Killing Me Softly with His Song” while on a plane and immediately fell in love with it. While on tour with Quincy Jones, she covered the song, and the audience fell in love with it, too, as they’d continue to for decades.

Her voice is otherworldly in her recording — pinpointing a kind of neo-soul R&B that would dominate for years to come — and she was recognized for it. Flack became the first artist to win consecutive Grammys for best record with this one.

The song would win again in the ’90s, when hip-hop trio the Fugees’ would offer their masterful take on Flack’s cover and introduce much of the world to singer Lauryn Hill’s gift.

### ‘Feel Like Makin’ Love,’ 1975

A standard for R&B and jazz musicians alike — no doubt due to the grandeur of Flack’s version — “Feel Like Makin’ Love” is her third career No. 1. It’s a mediative seduction, Flack embodying each lyrical vignette in her delivery. “Strollin’ in the park / Watchin’ winter turn to spring,” she opens the song, “Walkin’ in the dark / Seein’ lovers do their thing.”

### ‘The Closer I Get to You,’ 1978

A soulful collaboration with her close friend Donny Hathaway, “The Closer I Get to You,” is a reflective romance, both big-voiced and bigger-hearted singers lifting each other up. But despite its splendor, the song’s legacy is marred in tragedy: In 1979, Flack and Hathaway started work on an album of duets when he suffered a breakdown during recording and fell to his death from his hotel room in Manhattan.

### ‘Tonight, I Celebrate My Love,’ 1983

The ’80s brought soft rock detouring for Flack, another experimentation for the innovative performer. “Tonight, I Celebrate My Love,” a duet with the R&B balladeer Peabo Bryson, is at the intersection of a few genres and simultaneously timeless — a feat for a song anchored in shimmer, synthesized production.

### ‘Set the Night to Music,’ 1991

In her later career, Flack continued to meet the current moment. A great example is “Set the Night to Music,” a glossy pop song with English singer Maxi Priest. It was released on her 1991 album of the same name, which also features a then-contemporary cover of Philadelphia soul group The Stylistics’ 1970s R&B hit “You Make Me Feel Brand New.”



CHARLES SYKES, INVISION/AP

Tate McRae, 21, just released her third studio album and is gearing up for a world tour.

## McRae positions herself to claim dirty-pop crown

By CRISTINA JALERU  
Associated Press

She can sing. She can dance. She’s mastered a sultry gaze. She can write a smutty phrase. Is Tate McRae the new princess of dirty, breathy pop? (Sorry, Britney Spears. A new Gen Z star approaches.)

The “hardest working Canadian recording artist” award must surely go to McRae in 2025, who at age 21 has released her third studio album, “So Close to What,” and is gearing up for a world tour.

A trained dancer, McRae first garnered attention in 2016 when she was one of the finalists on the 13th season of “So You Think You Can Dance.” She’s added songwriting and singing to her résumé since then, hoping to become a full-blown pop star. And on “So Close to What,” she makes a convincing effort. She just needs to find the tune that will propel her to higher echelons.

The generous, 15-track album offers an array of serviceably sexy pop songs that hark back to the early 2000s, but mostly

skew modern. (Truth be told, the more she looks back, the better the track.) The standouts are the seductive ones that lure the listener in with an earworm chorus, the ones that recognize a good beat and are not afraid to use it: “Sports car,” “Purple lace bra” and the brassy “It’s ok I’m ok” among them.

“Miss possessive,” also the name of her upcoming tour, starts the album in force with a great choppy hook. “Revolving door” and “Means I care” — both energetic pop bops — are enhanced by dancehall production.

A duet with McRae’s boyfriend, The Kid LAROI, “I know love,” is contemporary romance with its trappy hi-hats and nonchalant energy.

The album’s verve starts to wane toward the last tracks as in the soft, casual “Green Light,” or “Nostalgia,” which breaks out the acoustic guitar and lets McRae really showcase her vocals.

Has she taken the crown of pop princess from Spears with this album? Not quite. But she’s close.



Tate McRae  
So Close to What (RCA)

## Rebecca Black

Salvation  
(Self-released)

Rebecca Black, she of the inescapable 2011 online smash hit “Friday,” has a new dance-heavy EP, “Salvation.” For an artist who first emerged at age 13 promising danceable fuel, she continues deliver — just with a very different approach.

Now 27, the singer, songwriter and DJ has evolved past her early viral days to find new tools to articulate fun: thumping techno, garage revivalism, house bangers.

“Salvation” is Black’s fourth EP. It offers seven well-produced albeit short tracks; in an ideal world, it would’ve been a full album with more latitude and aural landscape to play with.

Even in its abridged fashion, Black uses “Salvation” as a declaration of autonomy, exploring themes related to the very challenges of her sudden rise more than a decade ago.

The title track is a hot-and-bothered romance with a nice backbeat atop acid bass and Black delivering a convincing Lady Gaga-inspired sprechgesang.

Three tracks later, during “American Doll,” Black addresses expectations she’s had to endure and combat. “Sit up / Act right / Smile big / Spotlight / Don’t speak / Be nice,” Black sings in the opening. She examines the love-hate relationship that fans have with her and her journey: “Did you like me better then? / Do you wanna hate me now?” she continues. “Playing pretty and pretend / With a pillow on my mouth.”

If there is a standout, it is “Sugar Water Cyanide,” a club-ready song ripe for a deep remix and accessible with pitched-up vocals. The dance floor beckons.

For many years now, Black has been in the driver’s seat of her career, distancing herself from the pressure that arrives with becoming very famous, very fast, while very young. And she may continue to keep both hands on the wheel, as long as she can keep manipulative industry forces at a safe distance.

On this release, her “Salvation” appears to be that freedom. And it makes for a fun listen.

— Ron Harris  
Associated Press



AP

Rebecca Black, who became very famous very fast and very young with her 2011 viral hit “Friday,” uses her fourth EP, “Salvation,” as a declaration of autonomy.



## HEALTH &amp; FITNESS

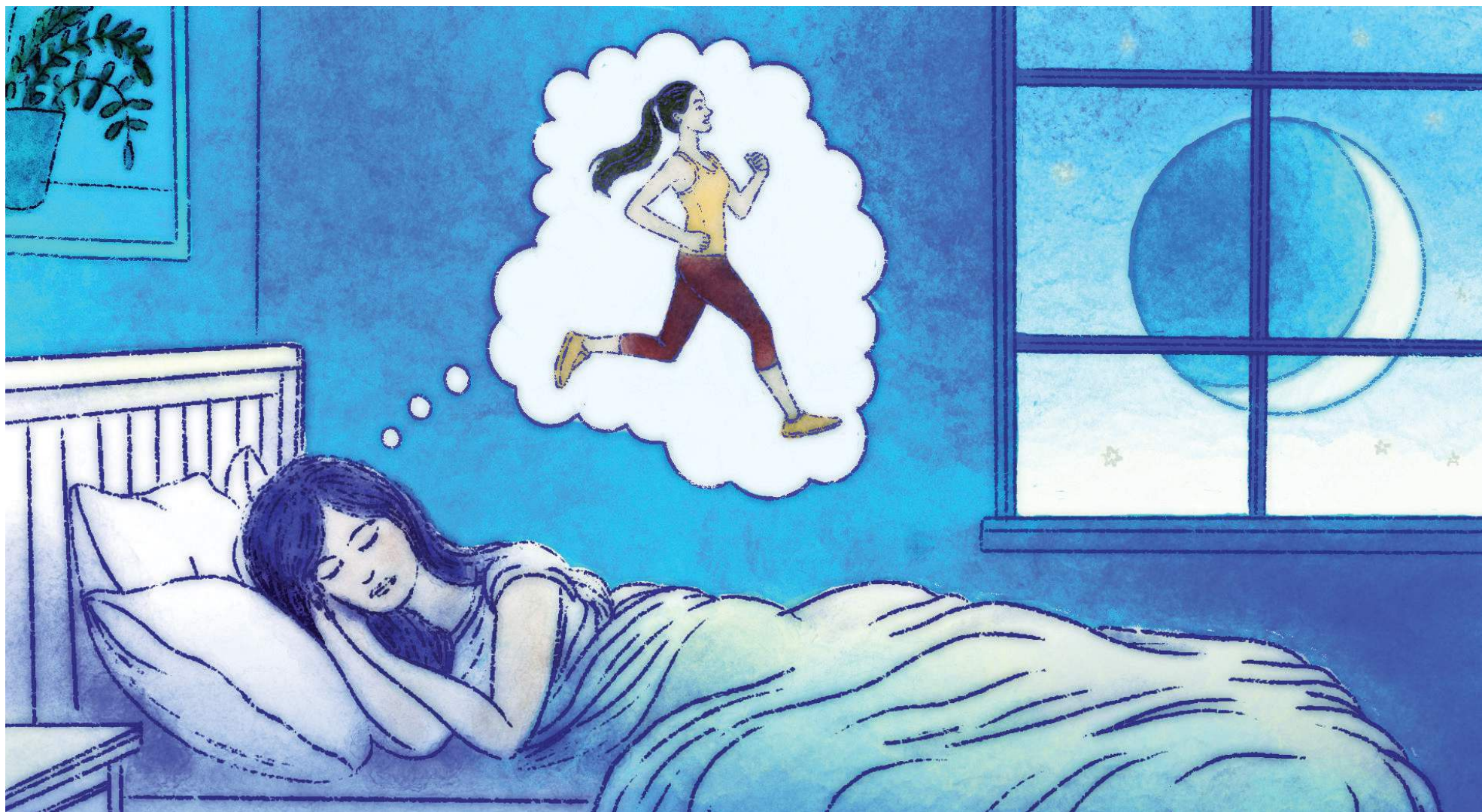


ILLUSTRATION BY PETER HAMLIN/AP

During deep sleep the body repairs muscle tissue, and studies show that well-rested people perform better and are less likely to get injured.

# The importance of exercise recovery

Fitness industry moving away from 'no pain, no gain' mentality and extolling benefits of prioritizing rest, mindfulness

BY ALBERT STUMM  
Associated Press

If you ever turned the TV on in the 2000s after midnight, you might have seen an infomercial for P90X.

The exercise program promised shredded abs and bulging biceps for anyone who pushed themselves to their limits for 90 days of 90-minute workouts. So it may come as a surprise that its creator, Tony Horton, now preaches the benefits of rest and warns against overtraining.

"I didn't know then what I know now," said Horton, who had spent the '90s training celebrities. "Back then it was all about warm-ups and cool-downs, and telling them to eat better and get off the hooch."

His evolution reflects a broader shift in the exercise industry away from a "no pain, no gain" mentality that once dominated but often led to injury. Instead, the current buzzword in fitness is "recovery."

Horton — who at 66 still exudes a boyish exuberance — noted that P90X did include recovery days with stretching and low-impact movement such as yoga. But these days, he prioritizes mindfulness as much as exercise, and the time between workouts is filled with plenty of good sleep, plunges in frigid water baths, using foam rollers on tight muscles, relaxing in a sauna and other activities in the name of recovery.

"If you don't get the recovery and the rest part right, then you're never going to be able to be consistent with the fitness end of things," Horton said.

## A more holistic approach to exercise

Before Horton, Jane Fonda had pushed home exercisers to "feel the burn," while bodybuilders lifted weights to the point of muscle failure. Now, the American College of Sports Medicine and the National Academy of Sports Medicine, two of the largest organizations certifying personal trainers, emphasize recovery methods.

NASM's "Fitness and Wellness" certification includes training in "holistic health and wellness including physical, mental, social and emotional well-being."

The industry has learned from research that shows the benefit of proper rest, said Stan Kravchenko, founder of the OneFit personal training platform. During deep sleep, the body repairs muscle tissue, and studies show that well-rested people perform better and are less likely to get injured.

But rest is only part of recovery. Kravchenko said personal trainers used to focus only on specific exercises a client could do during their workout. Now, they're more like life coaches who also give exercise advice.

"It's more about your lifestyle, how you eat, how you sleep," he said. "Are you stressed? What do you do for living? Are you working from a desk? So it's taking a little bit more like a broad approach."

## Discomfort — not pain — still has a place

The "no pain, no gain" motto is great for athletes who can handle intense workouts and are looking to get stronger, but not everyone needs to push themselves that hard, Horton said. It depends on the goal.

Michael Zourdos, chair of exercise science and health promotion at Florida Atlantic University, said lifting weights "until failure" may build bigger muscles but isn't needed to increase strength. "There is a difference between training for health and training for elite perfor-

mance benefits," he said.

To realize the health benefits of a workout, it's still necessary to push yourself, Horton said. "In the muscles, the lungs, your heart, there's gotta be a certain amount of strain."

There is a big difference, however, between discomfort and acute pain. If discomfort crosses into sharp pain in joints, tendons or muscles, stop that movement.

## How long to rest after a workout?

People's needs vary depending on their goals and bodies. But Kravchenko offered a few general guidelines:

For lifting weights, he recommends allowing 48 hours of recovery time per muscle group and doing a maximum of 10 sets per muscle group per week. During the workout, he said, it's best to rest for two to three minutes between sets, as opposed to old advice to wait only a minute before exercising the same muscles.

In between workouts, it's not necessary to stay still.

"You're welcome to do walking, jogging, very light yoga, stretching, pilates, core exercises," Kravchenko said. "That's all fine, because it's not specifically targeting the areas you've targeted before."

## Mindfulness as exercise recovery

Horton and Kravchenko both mentioned a recovery practice not typically associated with weightlifting — meditation. A few quiet minutes every morning helps you deal with the physical and emotional stress of life that can get in the way of wanting to exercise, they said.

Horton recommends establishing a mindfulness routine even before formalizing an exercise plan because it will lay the groundwork to be consistent.

"What is your strategy to get to get healthy and to get fit and to stay that way?" he said. "A lot of it has to do with letting the pendulum swing the other way."



CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

SQUARE TO BEGIN  
BY JOHN KUGELMAN / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

John Kugelman, of Gainesville, Va., is a software engineer and musician. Remarkably, this is his seventh Sunday Times crossword since January 2024 — by far the most of any contributor. “All the time and creative energy I used to pour into music,” he says, “now goes to crosswords. I used to spend my nights writing music. Now it’s all crosswords, all the time. It seems to scratch the same itch.” — W.S.

- ACROSS**

1 Shopper’s thrill

6 Clock part

9 Brand

14 \_\_\_\_ Lakshmi, host of TV’s “Taste the Nation”

19 Some computer-generated images nowadays

20 The masses

22 “Full steam \_\_\_\_!”

23 “Omgod, omigod, jackpot!”?

25 Some college students, quaintly

26 Space heater?

27 \_\_\_\_ fly

28 Smart-alecky

29 FaceTime alternative

30 “Eww!”

32 Instruments with large bells

35 Great Lakes mnemonic

38 Org. whose employees wear badges

40 Atlantis and others

42 Hawkish

44 Bad thing to be caught in

45 Tempest in a teapot?

48 Oh-so-precious

50 Journalists quote them

51 Oniony vegetables

52 Body of water that was once the world’s fourth-largest lake

55 Good signs in stock reports

56 Challah bread feature

58 Religious gymgoer on leg day?

60 Souvenir from the Sea of Tranquility, say

63 Typical Passover mo.

64 Many clay relics

65 Not just mine

66 Kanga’s kiddo

67 Whimsically imaginative, as writing

70 Sound from some freshly cleaned floors?

75 Oozes

76 Heighten

77 Yo-yo-like toy with a devilish-sounding name

78 “\_\_\_\_ mia!”

80 Michael Jordan’s nickname, with “His”

82 Trash

83 Money under the mattress, e.g.?

88 Meyer who directed 1965’s “Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!”

89 Cialis alternative

90 Backslid, say

93 Word before or after down

94 Pasta often cut at an angle

95 Hazard cleanup, in brief

96 Hindu honorifics

98 Weapon whose name is an acronym

100 “\_\_\_\_ tell”

103 Legendary bird

105 Number of jurors who originally vote “Not guilty” in “12 Angry Men”

106 Mean little suckers?

107 Repeat something clever, as parrots might?

112 “Gesundheit!” prompter

113 “Diet” for the defeated

114 Tied up

115 Facebook has more than three billion of them

116 Aspirations

117 “Downton Abbey” network

118 Flies out of sight
- DOWN**

1 Fresh

2 Excites . . . or annoys

3 Vulgarity

4 Poet’s palindromic preposition

5 Midflight announcements, for short

6 Count seen in the breakfast aisle

7 Cry of cringe

8 Animated file type

9 Actress Singer of “Footloose”

10 Elevs.

11 Deep, dark ocean caverns

12 Equivalent of a billion years, in geology

13 Bad thing to be caught in

14 Cigarette purchases

15 Nautical greeting

16 Scrumptious but not-so-healthy carnival snacks

17 Brought in big bucks

18 Elements of pay-per-click campaigns

21 Punching sounds in the comics

24 Coffee shop order

29 Feudal worker

31 In a big way

33 Pot growers?

34 Classifies

36 Mice hunters

37 Great Leap Forward leader

39 Bitter brews, for short

41 Lock of hair

42 Something strapped for cash?

43 Go-kart, e.g.

44 Beaten at \_\_\_\_ own game

46 Command+Q, on a Mac

47 Family group

48 Writing cliché

49 Style sported by Theodore Roosevelt and Mark Twain

52 Forehead-slapping shouts

53 Outfit

54 Mysterious qualities

56 Yawning, say

57 Hollywood’s Portia de \_\_\_\_

59 “Raggedy” doll

60 Make faces for a camera

61 Barbecue bits

62 Gorilla who famously learned sign language

65 “If I had to guess . . .”

68 They’re around for the long haul

69 Scorch

70 More refined

71 Loma \_\_\_\_, Calif.

72 Monthly util. bill

73 Host of the 2022 World Cup

74 Horseshoe-shaped pipe fasteners

76 Boat equipment for removing water on board

78 Car sticker no.

79 Parasailing, water polo, etc.

80 “Watchmen” writer Moore

81 What many freelancers work on

84 Many a road tripper, informally

85 “Ich bin \_\_\_\_ Berliner”

86 They make sounds when they’re tickled

87 Wood joint piece

91 Beethoven’s Third

92 What Sidney Poitier’s character famously came to, in a 1967 film

94 Currency in seven American countries (and one Asian)

95 Van \_\_\_\_ (beard type)

97 Germs

99 Toffee candy bar

101 Broccoli \_\_\_\_

102 Leather-working tools

104 Cartoon collector’s collection, maybe

106 Greek letter that’s the symbol for torque

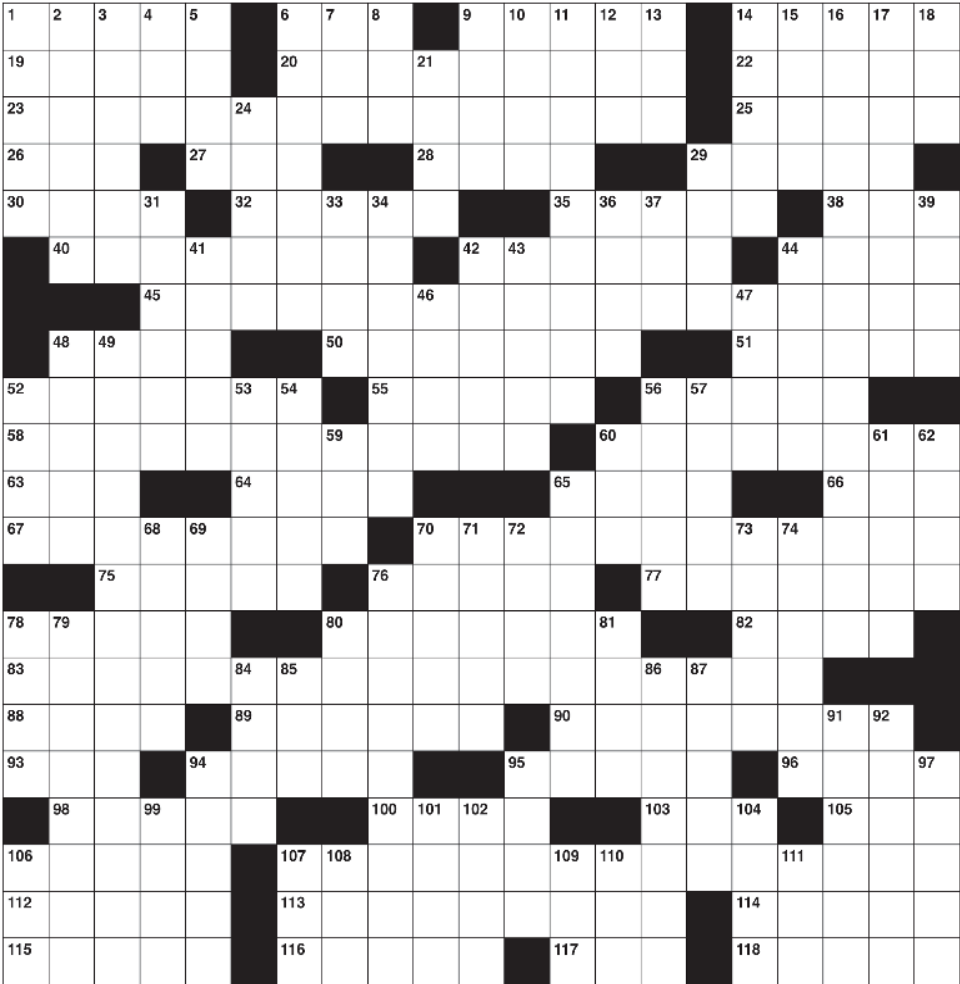
107 [I’m trying to watch the movie!]

108 Status follower

109 Slack or Zoom

110 Fudge the facts

111 Language mutually intelligible with Thai



- 70 More refined

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FACES

Oscar-winning actor Hackman found dead

**BY HILLEL ITALIE**  
*Associated Press*

Gene Hackman, the prolific Oscar-winning actor whose studied portraits ranged from reluctant heroes to conniving villains and made him one of the industry’s most respected and honored performers, was found dead along with his wife and their dog at their Santa Fe, N.M., home on Wednesday. He was 95.

Authorities said Thursday that foul play isn’t suspected, but they haven’t disclosed how the couple died and said an investigation is ongoing.

Hackman’s dozens of films included Oscar-winning roles in “The French Connection” and “Unforgiven,” a breakout performance in “Bonnie and Clyde,” a comic interlude in “Young Frankenstein,” a turn as the comic book villain Lex Luthor in “Superman” and the title character in Wes Anderson’s 2001 “The Royal Tenenbaums.”

He seemed capable of any kind of role — whether an uptight buffoon in “Birdcage,” a college coach finding redemption in the sentimental favorite “Hoosiers” or a secretive surveillance expert in Francis Ford Coppola’s Watergate-era release “The Conversation.”

“Gene Hackman [was] a great actor, inspiring and magnificent in his work and complexity,” Coppola said on Instagram. “I mourn his loss, and celebrate his existence and contribution.”

A plain-looking man with a receding hairline, Hackman held special status within Hollywood — heir to Spencer Tracy as an everyman, actor’s actor and reluctant celebrity. He embodied the ethic of doing his job, doing it very well, and letting others worry about his image. The industry seemed to need him more than he needed the industry.

Beyond the obligatory appearances at awards ceremonies, he was rarely seen on the social circuit and made no secret of his disdain for the business side of show business.

“Actors tend to be shy people,” he told Film Comment in 1988. “There is perhaps a component of hostility in that shyness, and to reach a point where you don’t deal with others in a hostile or angry way, you choose this medium for yourself.”

He was an early retiree — essentially done, by choice, with movies by his 70s — and a late bloomer. Hackman was in his mid-30s when cast for “Bonnie and Clyde” and past 40 when he won his first Oscar, as the rules-bending New York detective “Popeye” Doyle in the 1971 thriller about tracking down Manhattan drug smugglers, “The French Connection.”



AP

**Actor Gene Hackman attends the Golden Globe Awards in 2003.**

Notable Hackman films

- 1961 — “Mad Dog Coll” (debut)
- 1964 — “Liliith”
- 1966 — “Hawaii”
- 1967 — “Bonnie and Clyde” (Academy Award nomination, supporting actor)
- 1969 — “The Gypsy Moths,” “Downhill Racer,” “I Never Sang for My Father” (Academy Award nomination, supporting actor)
- 1971 — “The French Connection” (as “Popeye” Doyle, best actor Academy Award win)
- 1972 — “Prime Cut,” “Cisco Pike,” “The Poseidon Adventure”
- 1974 — “The Conversation,” “Young Frankenstein” (cameo)
- 1975 — “The French Connection II,” “Lucky Lady”
- 1978 — “Superman” (as Lex Luthor)
- 1980 — “Superman II”
- 1981 — “Reds”
- 1983 — “Superman III”
- 1986 — “Hoosiers”
- 1987 — “No Way Out,” “Superman IV”
- 1988 — “Mississippi Burning” (best actor Academy Award nomination)
- 1992 — “Unforgiven” (Academy Award win for supporting actor)
- 1993 — “The Firm”
- 1995 — “Crimson Tide,” “Get Shorty”
- 1996 — “The Birdcage,” “The Chamber,” “Extreme Measures”
- 1997 — “Absolute Power”
- 1998 — “Twilight,” “Enemy of the State”
- 2000 — “Under Suspicion,” “The Replacements”
- 2001 — “The Mexican,” “Heist,” “The Royal Tenenbaums,” “Behind Enemy Lines”
- 2003 — “Runaway Jury”
- 2004 — “Welcome to Mooseport”

From The Associated Press

Jackie Gleason, Steve McQueen and Peter Boyle were among the actors considered for the role. Hackman was a minor star at the time, seemingly without the flamboyant personality that the role demanded.

The actor himself feared that he was miscast. A couple of weeks of nighttime patrols of Harlem in police cars helped reassure him.

Hackman also resisted the role that brought him his second Oscar. When Clint Eastwood first offered him Little Bill Daggett, the corrupt town boss in “Unforgiven,” Hackman turned it down. But he realized that Eastwood was planning to make a different kind of western, a critique, not a celebration of violence. The film won him the Academy Award as best supporting actor of 1992.

“To his credit, and my joy, he talked me into it,” Hackman said of Eastwood during an interview with the American Film Institute.



James Mangold

**Timothée Chalamet says he worked for five years to learn how to sing and play like Bob Dylan for his Academy Award-nominated role as the iconic folk musician in “A Complete Unknown.”**

Instrumental instruction

Meet the musician who taught Chalamet to play guitar like Bob Dylan

**BY DAVID BAUDER**

*Associated Press*

He’s not a movie buff, so New York musician Larry Saltzman doesn’t always watch the Oscars. This year, however, he’s got a rooting interest.

Saltzman taught actor Timothée Chalamet how to play guitar for the role of Bob Dylan in “A Complete Unknown.” In turn, Chalamet earned a best actor nomination and the film is also up for best picture at the Academy Awards on Sunday.

A guitarist who’s performed with Simon & Garfunkel, Bette Midler and David Johansen, as well as in the pit at several Broadway productions, Saltzman has developed a specialty in teaching actors. Besides Chalamet, recent pupils include Adam Driver and Sadie Sink of “Stranger Things.”

On a fellow musician’s recommendation, Saltzman first got a call from a movie studio about a decade ago. Meryl Streep needed to learn the electric guitar for her starring role in the 2015 film “Ricki and the Flash,” where she portrayed an aging rocker.

Working with Streep is a little like a political consultant’s first client being elected president. If she likes you and word gets around, other students will follow. Teaching actors now represents about 40% of his business, the 69-year-old said.

Faking it just won’t do for serious actors and film directors. It’s like lip-syncing — the audience is going to be able to tell the difference. That was especially true with Chalamet, who needed to sing and play at the same time for a character whose artistry is the centerpiece of the film.

“When the actors come to you, they’re kind of vulnerable,” Saltzman said. “They want to do a great job.”

Saltzman had more than 50 sessions with Chalamet, starting in person and retreating to Zoom during the pandemic. It wasn’t easy. Chalamet had to learn some 25 songs in the script.

It helped that Saltzman is a Dylan buff. Focusing on imparting “the guitar playing of ‘pre-electric Bob,’” he taught his charge so well that Chalamet was a musical guest



MATT LICARI, INVISION/AP

**Larry Saltzman had more than 50 sessions with Chalamet to teach him how to play guitar.**

as well as host on “Saturday Night Live” last month.

It’s an eye-opening experience for Saltzman to later see his students on screen.

“In my own humble way, I’m a small gear in that machinery,” he said. “What is rewarding is knowing that in some small way I’m contributing to making a better film.”

on Nickelodeon’s “The Adventures of Pete & Pete” from 1994 to 1996 and then starred in the film adaptations of “Harriet the Spy.”

In 2000, Trachtenberg joined the cast of “Buffy,” playing Dawn Summers, younger sister of the title character played by Sarah Michelle Gellar from 2000 to 2003.

Trachtenberg went on to recurring roles on “Six Feet Under,” “Weeds” and “Gossip Girl,” where she played the gang’s scheming nemesis, Georgina Sparks.

‘Buffy the Vampire Slayer’ actress Trachtenberg dies

*Associated Press*

Michelle Trachtenberg, a former child star who appeared in the 1996 “Harriet the Spy” hit movie and went on to co-star in two buzzy millennial-era TV shows — “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” and “Gossip Girl” — has died. She was 39.

Police responded to a 911 call shortly after 8 a.m. at a 51-story luxury apartment tower in Manhattan’s Hell’s Kitchen neighborhood where officers found Trachtenberg “unconscious and unre-



**Trachtenberg in 2008**

sponsive,” according to an NYPD statement.

Paramedics pronounced her dead at the scene. No foul play was suspected and the New York Medical Examiner is investigating the cause of death, police said.

Trachtenberg was 8 when she began playing Nona Mecklenberg



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Veterinarian faces charge after failing to return dog

**MI** GRAND RAPIDS — A Michigan veterinarian who said she rescued a distressed dog that was tied to a truck is facing a theft charge after failing to return him to a homeless man.

Amanda Hergenreder took the dog on a two-hour drive to her clinic, where she performed procedures to relieve a severe urinary tract infection and remove a rotten tooth. She named him Biggby and says the 16-year-old pit bull mix is thriving nearly four months later.

But the Kent County prosecutor said Biggby belongs to Chris Hamilton, who lately lacks a permanent home in the Grand Rapids area and claims ownership of a dog known to him as his beloved Vinny.

“I just want my dog back,” Hamilton, 57, told WOOD-TV. “I had my dog 15 years. Never neglected him and, you know, we loved each other. I mean, I felt like I lost part of my body after that.”

Prosecutor Chris Becker said it is a simple case of larceny. Jury selection for a future trial is scheduled for March 6.

Hergenreder said she was in Grand Rapids in November for a professional conference when she saw the dog tied to a truck near a Biggby coffee shop. There is no dispute that she called the police department and animal shelter and also talked to a shop employee.

Hamilton acknowledged that he tied the dog to the truck while he walked to a gas station. He said when he returned, about 45 minutes later, coffee shop employees told him “some lady in a van came and took my dog.”

## Republicans seek to alter universal mail-in voting

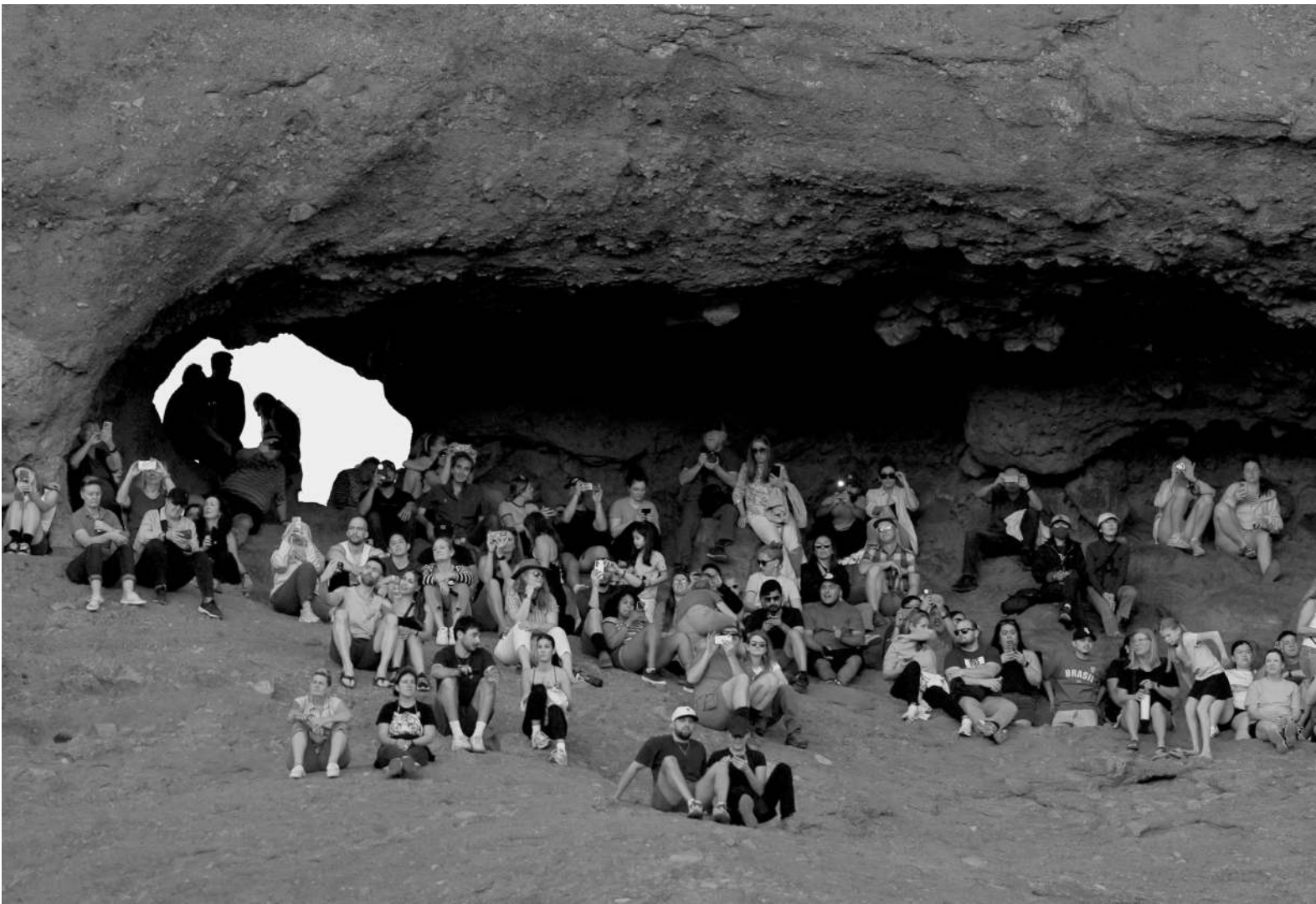
**UT** SALT LAKE CITY — Utah’s universal mail-in voting system could be the first casualty of a Republican overhaul of the state’s election operations as lawmakers look to improve efficiency and trust in the system.

The state’s Republican-controlled House passed a bill in a 57-15 vote Tuesday that would require Utah voters to opt in to receive their ballots in the mail, meaning they would no longer get them automatically.

Starting next year, voters who want to return their ballots by mail or to a drop box would need to include the last four digits of their driver’s license or state ID number.

The proposal would dramatically change the voting system in one of just eight states — and the only led by Republicans — that allows all elections to be conducted by mail without a need to opt in.

An earlier version required voters to make an in-person appearance and show ID if they wanted to return their ballots in the mail. Senate leaders said they would not



LINDSEY WASSON/AP

## Phoenix setting

People watch the sun set from the Hole in the Rock at Papago Park, Tuesday, in Phoenix.

support a proposal making mail-in voting that difficult.

## Report of campus danger was a misunderstanding

**OH** NEW CONCORD — A sheriff’s office investigating a report of a possible shooting that prompted a lockdown at Ohio’s Muskingum University determined Monday night that no shooting occurred.

Muskingum County Sheriff Matt Lutz said the report of a possible shooting was due to a staff member misunderstanding students who were talking about a loud domestic dispute that had happened earlier.

After interviewing students and checking buildings officials found no evidence of a shooting, so the shelter in place was lifted, according to Lutz.

## Advocates seek Medicaid expansion in holdout state

**AL** MONTGOMERY — Advocates gathered at the Alabama Statehouse on Tuesday urging lawmakers to reconsider their long-held reluctance to expand Medicaid, saying the decision is hurting both working families and health care providers. But the push comes at a time there is gathering uncertainty about possible cuts and changes in Washington to Medicaid, the safety net program that provides health care to 80 million U.S.

adults and children.

The Affordable Care Act called for states to expand Medicaid programs to cover adults ages 19 to 64 with incomes up to 138% of the federal poverty level, about \$21,597 for a single person or \$29,187 for a family of two. But a U.S. Supreme Court decision made expansion optional. People earning more than that are eligible for federal health insurance subsidies through an online marketplace.

The uninsured rates in states without Medicaid expansion are nearly twice as high as those in expansion states, or 14% to 7.6%, according to numbers released Tuesday by KFF, a health policy research organization.

## Walz to mull 3rd run for governor, not Senate seat

**MN** ST. PAUL — Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz won’t seek Minnesota’s open U.S. Senate seat next year and is instead considering a run for a third term as governor, the Democrat’s spokesman announced Wednesday.

The former vice presidential candidate announced his decision nearly two weeks after U.S. Sen. Tina Smith, a Democrat, announced she would not seek reelection in 2026.

Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan said soon after Smith’s announcement that she was running. Other Democrats considering runs include U.S. Reps. Ilhan Omar and Angie

Craig, Attorney General Keith Ellison, and Secretary of State Steve Simon.

Republican Royce White, a conservative critic of the party establishment and former NBA player who lost to U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar in 2024, had already said he would challenge Smith in 2026 and is staying in the race.

Retired Navy SEAL and former congressional candidate Adam Schwarze has also said he’s running.

## Thieves fake seizure, steal pricey bulldogs

**CO** DENVER — Thieves nabbed a pair of high-priced bulldogs from a Colorado pet store after a man allegedly faked a seizure to distract employees while an accomplice grabbed the puppies from a pen and ran out, authorities said.

The theft, which was captured on surveillance video, happened Sunday.

Three men walked into a pet store in suburban Denver a few minutes apart, walked around and asked questions about the puppies, which sell for \$4,299 each, the Arapahoe County Sheriff’s Office said. While a 37-year-old man appeared to be having a seizure, one of the other men took two of the puppies and began running out of the store. An employee tried to tackle him and the man dropped the puppies but managed to grab them again and run out with a sec-

ond man, the sheriff’s office said.

They got into a gold Cadillac Escalade with tinted windows and no license plates that pulled up outside the store, the sheriff’s office said.

The man who allegedly faked a seizure was arrested on suspicion of conspiracy to commit a felony, theft, and drug possession. Investigators are looking for the other two men and the getaway driver.

One of the puppies was later returned by a woman who bought it for \$1,500 from a street vendor and realized it looked like the dogs in photos shown in news coverage of the theft, the sheriff’s office said.

## Tribe institutes curfew in response to violent crime

**AZ** PHOENIX — A tribe in Arizona instituted a temporary curfew for members under 18 on Tuesday because of a recent increase in violent crime within the community.

Stephen Roe Lewis, governor of the Gila River Indian Community south of Phoenix, declared a public safety emergency and instituted the nearly two-week curfew, which will run from 7 p.m. until 5 a.m. every night until March 9.

The announcement came the same day there was a shooting within the community, according to a Facebook post by the Gila River Police Department.



Bizarro

Wayno & 3  
P.R.O.  
2-28-25

SPOTIFY'S LEAST-STREAMED ALBUMS

RUSTY RAILROAD BRAKES  
VOLUME 02

HOWLER MONKEYS  
Territory Disputes  
Predator Repulsion  
Mating Barks  
And More!

YOUR COWORKERS CLIPPING THEIR NAILS  
SURROUND SOUND

Loose Parts

I sometimes struggle over hiring decisions. But you ... You're a no-brainer.

2-28  
Get a signed copy of the NEW LP book! Get this cartoon signed & framed at LoosePartsComic.com  
©2025 Dave Blazek - looseparts@verizon.net - Dist. by Andrews McMeel Syndication

Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6		7	8	9	10	11
12				13				14				
15				16				17				
18				19								
20				21		22				23	24	25
				27	28			29	30			
31	32	33						34				
35					36			37				
38					39	40			41	42	43	44
					45				46		47	
48	49	50	51							52		
53						54				55		
56						57				58		

- ACROSS
- DOWN
- 57 Bobby of hockey
- 24 Mimic
- 58 Billboards
- 25 Actress Vardalos
- 26 Jewel
- 28 Mel's Diner order-taker
- 30 Peculiar
- 31 Saigon soup
- 32 Very long time
- 33 Noshed
- 36 Albacore, e.g.
- 37 Stumble
- 40 Green sauce
- 42 Puccini work
- 43 Played at a casino
- 44 Chorus section
- 45 Hawaiian coast
- 46 Russian ruler
- 48 Prof's degree
- 49 French assent
- 50 — -la-la
- 51 Director Howard

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

Frazz

I ASSIGNED THE CLASS TO WRITE ABOUT WHAT MAKES THEM ENTHUSIASTIC.

I GOT BACK 18 PAPERS THAT JUST SAID, "MAY."

IN RETROSPECT, NOT THE BEST ESSAY TO ASSIGN IN FEBRUARY.

ONCE AGAIN, THE TEACHER LEARNS THE MOST.

2-28  
©2025 Mallet Distributed by Andrews McMeel Syndication

Pearls Before Swine

HI, NEIGHBOR BOB... I JUST CAME BY TO SAY I WON'T BE ABLE TO GIVE YOU A BIRTHDAY PRESENT THIS YEAR.

SAME FOR NEXT YEAR. AND THE YEAR AFTER THAT.

JUST KNOW THAT I WAS PREPARED TO SPEND A GREAT DEAL OF MONEY ON ALL OF THEM.

LEAP YEAR BABIES ARE THE BEST.

©2025 Stephen Pastis Dist. by Andrews McMeel Syndication

Non Sequitur

IT MEANS NOW YOU GET TO LEARN THE TRUE MEANING OF LIFE

ASK ABOUT OUR BETTER-LATE-THAN-NEVER BONUS PACKAGE

©2025 Wiley Ink, Ltd. 2-28

Wumo

Happy Valentine's Day, honey ...

SHH! Not so loud! They might hear us!

©2025 Wally Reginald Dist. by Andrews McMeel Syndication

Carpe Diem

I'M SITTING AT THE GYM, WORKING. YES, IT'S LEGS DAY.

©2025 NIKLAS ERIKSSON/BULLS, DIST. BY KING FEATURES SYNDICATE, INC.

Beetle Bailey

I MISS MY MOM SO MUCH

SNIFF

BUT HE TALKED TO HER AN HOUR AGO

HER PHONE DIED

GREG + MORT WALKER

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2-28

CRYPTOQUIP

IBV'FG XROLCD ZG EB PBCRVZG  
EULR PVFTI PXSSXDG QXFLGEI  
GQGFI AXI XE ALCCGFELZG?  
BU, OXTG CB!  
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT COULD YOU CALL SOMEONE WHO IS SHARING A SUGARY DESSERT WITH YOU? YOUR SWEET-MATE.  
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: F equals R



Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15				16					17			
18			19					20				
			21				22					
23	24	25				26				27	28	29
30					31				32			
33				34				35				
			36				37					
38	39	40				41				42	43	44
45						46				47		
48						49				50		
51						52				53		

ACROSS

- 1 Bread spread
- 4 Barbershop prop
- 8 "The Martian" actor Michael
- 12 Nest egg letters
- 13 Rent- —
- 14 Wax-coated cheese
- 15 TV type
- 16 Bigfoot's cousin
- 17 Yearn
- 18 Grammy-winning "Don't Leave Me This Way" singer
- 21 007 creator Fleming
- 22 Hit CBS series
- 23 "Papa" of classical music
- 26 HBO rival
- 27 Fragrant neckwear
- 30 Rainbow
- 31 —/her/hers
- 32 Roll up
- 33 Sailor's chart
- 34 Carefree
- 35 "Bolero" composer
- 36 Beach lotion letters
- 37 Luau dish
- 38 Pulitzer-winning author of "The Night Watchman"
- 45 Swiss peaks
- 46 French cheese
- 47 Spelldown
- 48 Marriage vows

- 49 Auto designer Ferrari
- 50 — pickle
- 51 Contradict
- 52 Casual tops
- 53 NASCAR advertiser

- 23 That guy
- 24 Notre Dame coach
- 25 Shrill bark
- 26 Bashful
- 27 Candy heart word
- 28 Before
- 29 Unwell
- 31 Low-risk wager
- 32 Equitable
- 34 Family docs
- 35 Cowboy shows
- 36 Wimp
- 37 Nobel, for one
- 38 Set down
- 39 Shoppe description
- 40 Atop
- 41 Sea flier
- 42 Nile bird
- 43 Penny
- 44 Pile

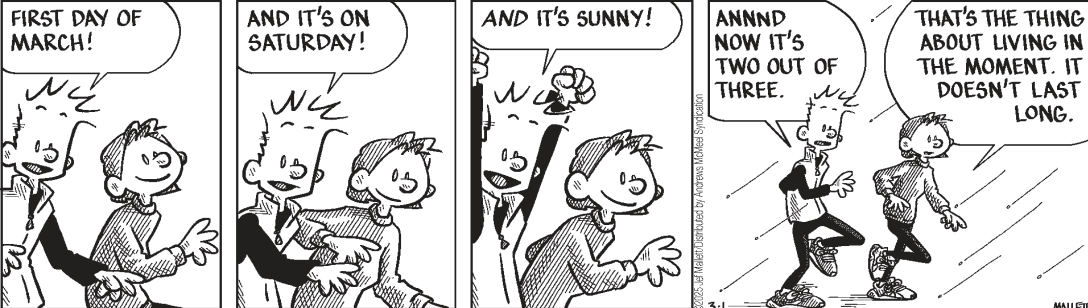
DOWN

- 1 Leave at the altar
- 2 Eyebrow shape
- 3 Constructed
- 4 Grand — (island south of Cuba)
- 5 Whale's home
- 6 Algebra or trig
- 7 French roll
- 8 Coke alternative
- 9 Redact
- 10 iPod type
- 11 Prayer ender
- 19 Pan covers
- 20 Mil. morale booster

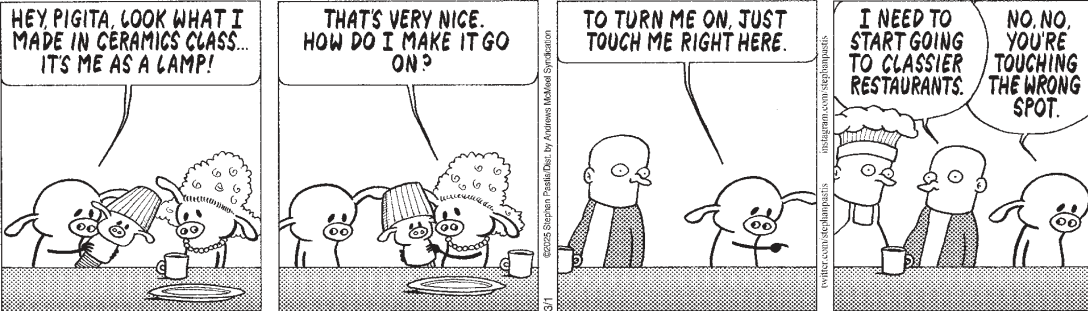
Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

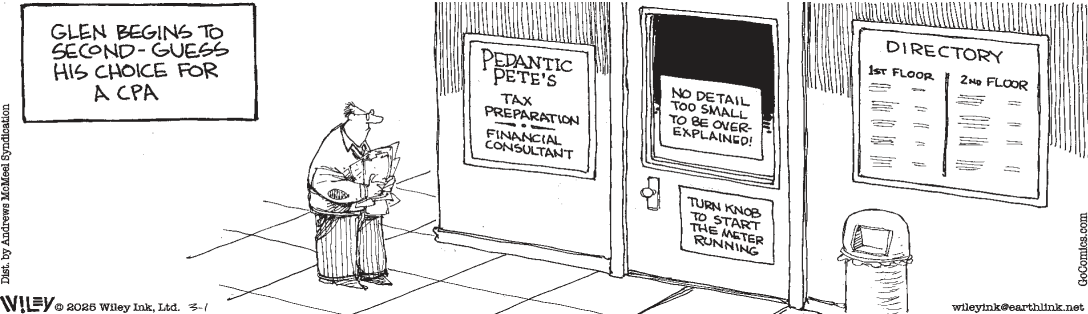
Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



Wumo



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



3-1

CRYPTOQUIP

AIFZVNI HDXN HPQM XN MPH  
ITIKZHIR IMPVBD HP DZKI  
NMPQ-UZFJIR NTPUIN, XN XH  
AITPQ NJX TIKIT?  
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: YOU'RE ASKING ME TO CONSUME THIS CURLY CABBAGE VARIETY EVERY DAY AT DINNERTIME? OH, KALE NO!  
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: T equals L





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 Lt. Col. Katie R. Fidler, Europe commander  
 John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff  
 Lt. Col. Marci Hoffman, Pacific commander

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Jacqueline Smith

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OPINION

Saying Russia invaded is not ‘complicated’

BY JONAH GOLDBERG  
 Tribune Content Agency  
 On the day before the third anniversary of the brutal, lawless invasion of Ukraine, “Fox News Sunday” host Shannon Bream pressed Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on whether it’s “fair to say” that Russia’s attack was unprovoked. Hegseth responded that it’s “fair to say it’s a very complicated situation.”

This is a good illustration of the difference between a complicated question and the complications of answering a simple question honestly. The answer to the question “Does this dress make me look fat?” may be simple enough, but answering it honestly can be quite difficult in some circumstances.

Hegseth is hardly the only prominent Republican official who has dodged the question since President Donald Trump outrageously claimed that Ukraine “started” the war. Mike Waltz, Trump’s national security adviser, also repeatedly refused to answer the question.

Sometimes figuring out who started a war is complicated. But this isn’t World War I or the War of Jenkins’ Ear. Of course Russia started it.

Given that the answer to the question is so uncomplicated, why is answering it so complicated?

It’s not because Russia will be offended by an accurate response. The West has provided billions in military aid to Ukraine and heaped sanctions on Vladimir Putin and his regime in response to the criminal invasion. Saying once again that Russia started the war would not change the geopolitical equation in the slight-

est.  
 No, what makes this complicated is that Trump is aping Putin’s talking points about who started the war. Publicly contradicting Trump creates complications for any Republican official who dares to do so.

If Trump says basset hounds can fly, they have to say it too. This is the dynamic that has bedeviled the GOP since Trump won the presidential nomination in 2016.

But as repugnant as I find the moral and intellectual corruption driving Republicans’ collective decision to lie to protect Trump’s ego and avoid the wrath of his fans, it’s worth keeping in mind that such corruption is a feature of politics more generally. Moreover, Trump’s success in so corrupting our politics relies on the widespread view that his critics are corrupt.

In recent years, Democrats have talked themselves into a kind of cul-de-sac by agreeing to enforce false pieties about everything from identity politics to Israel to inflation. When Joe Biden was still president, the pressure to insist that he was as fit as a fiddle and as sharp as a tack led them to prop up a fatally unpopular president.

Much of the media was rightly seen as complicit in that project. I’ve long argued that journalism is not immune to such corruptions. The fear of offending one’s readers or viewers drives more media bias and self-censorship than ideology does.

Fox News is so terrified of its viewers that it pandered to their hunger for confirmation of the lie that the 2020 election was stolen. It lost nearly \$800 million to a libel lawsuit as a con-

The problem with ‘peacekeepers’ in postwar Ukraine

BY PETER HARRIS  
 Special to Stars and Stripes

Newly minted Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth was being honest with Ukraine when he said the country will not return to its pre-2014 borders anytime soon. The same goes for his statements that Kyiv should not expect NATO membership as part of an agreement to end the war with Russia, and that the United States cannot be expected to shoulder the burden of supporting Ukraine going forward.

These were harsh realities for Ukrainians to hear, perhaps — but they are realities nonetheless. Hegseth’s candor is to be welcomed. But while the secretary of defense has gone a long way toward articulating a more realistic policy on Ukraine, it is important that one false hope is not exchanged for another.

In particular, President Donald Trump’s team should clarify what Hegseth meant when he said that “robust security guarantees” will be needed “to ensure that the war will not begin again.” To state the obvious: security is a hard thing to guarantee. It almost always requires the threat or use of force. But who will use force to uphold Ukraine’s postwar borders?

Hegseth seems to have accepted the inevitability of “peacekeepers” being tasked with implementing a future peace agreement. If true, however, this would be a concerning development. To be sure, Hegseth appeared to rule out U.S. participation in any peacekeeping force and rejected a role for NATO’s alliance structures. Instead, he referenced “capable European and non-European troops” as candidates for guaranteeing Ukraine’s postwar borders.

But there is a real risk of “peacekeeping” being used as an appealing shorthand that lures policymakers into believing that security can be provided on the cheap or without loss of life. Nothing could be further from the truth. As Irish peacekeepers in Lebanon and Uruguayans in the Democratic Republic of Congo can attest, peacekeeping missions are difficult to establish and often deadly to maintain.

There are basically two types of peacekeeping forces. First, there are peacekeepers who exist with the consent of the warring parties. These forces are deployed when both sides to a military conflict agree on a peace agreement and request that a neutral third party is given the job of upholding some of the terms.

Clearly, Russia will never agree to Europeans assuming such a role. This is for the simple reason that most European countries are not neutral, and so Moscow will never trust them to serve as impartial arbiters. It is technically possible that a neutral non-European government could provide military personnel for such a mission, but it is hard to imagine Russia being deterred as a result.

Second, there are peacekeepers who are deployed without the consent of one or both belligerents — usually at the direction of an international organization such as the United Nations. These might properly be called peace “enforcers,” because their job is to impose a settlement upon combatants who do not recognize a peacekeeping mandate.

This is a nonstarter in the context of Ukraine. To do their jobs, enforcers must be willing to use hard power to gain compliance. But there is no government in the world that wants to select into a shooting war with nuclear-armed Russia — a lesson Ukraine has learned the hard way over the past three years.

sequence — all because telling the simple truth would have been so very complicated.

The Associated Press, which is facing petty retaliation for its refusal to honor Trump’s petty attempt to rename the Gulf of Mexico, has a long history of trying to smuggle ideological arguments into its supposedly objective coverage. Anyone who adheres to the AP Stylebook, a hegemonic force in journalism, can’t refer to “illegal immigrants,” must capitalize “black,” and has to observe right-think on transgender pronouns. And even after officials in Israel confirmed that an Israeli woman and her children were beaten to death by their captors in Gaza, the AP continues to report that they merely “died in captivity.” No, they were murdered in captivity.

Even dictionaries aren’t immune to this kind of corruption. After Democrats accused Amy Coney Barrett of bigotry for using the phrase “sexual preference” during her Supreme Court confirmation hearing, Merriam-Webster changed its definition of the term in real time to back up the claim that it was “offensive.”

Social media, partisan polarization and politicization of institutions have fueled an erosion of trust across society. This is an ideal milieu for a president who cares not for facts or truth but only about his own vanity and glory. And that’s how answering the simple question “Who started the war?” got so complicated. Telling the truth requires a degree of courage that is disqualifying in Trump’s circle.

Jonah Goldberg is editor-in-chief of The Dispatch and the host of The Remnant podcast.

For these reasons, it is probably wishful thinking to imagine a traditional peacekeeping force for Ukraine. So, why does the idea continue to be raised? The answer is that when President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other European leaders talk about peacekeepers, they mean something quite different from the textbook definitions. Their undisguised hope is that a NATO army will be stationed on Ukrainian soil for the purpose of deterring Russia from invading again. This is why Zelenskyy has always insisted that U.S. participation would be essential — because he wants powerful allied forces to be based along his frontier with Russia, not neutral peacekeepers.

To be clear, this would not be peacekeeping. Those who use the vocabulary of “peacekeeping” to advance the idea are playing fast and loose with the word, likely on purpose. What they actually want is Ukraine’s de facto inclusion in NATO. This is something that the Trump administration should oppose because it would be wholly at odds with U.S. policy and interests, risking a hot war with Russia.

Peacekeepers are not a solution to Ukrainian insecurity, now or for the foreseeable future. The only real way to guarantee Ukraine’s postwar borders will be to arm Ukraine such that it can deter renewed Russian aggression by credibly threatening to defend itself. This is an outcome well within grasp, and the Trump administration should work with European partners to make it happen. In the final analysis, talk of peacekeeping is an unhelpful distraction from this more achievable goal of armed neutrality for Ukraine.

Peter Harris is an associate professor of political science at Colorado State University and non-resident fellow with Defense Priorities.



# SCOREBOARD/SOCCER

COLLEGE BASKETBALL	
Wednesday men’s scores	
EAST	
Boston U. 79, Lehigh 68	
Bucknell 70, Loyola (Md.) 67	
Charleston (WV) 84, Glenville St. 69	
Colgate 81, Holy Cross 73	
Dayton 85, Rhode Island 77	
Duquesne 67, La Salle 62	
East Stroudsburg 105, Kutztown 85	
Fairmont St. 96, WV Wesleyan 66	
Indiana (Pa.) 84, California (Pa.) 76	
Lincoln (Pa.) 58, Winston-Salem 42	
Lock Haven 83, Bloomsburg 63	
Md.-Eastern Shore 68, NC Central 59	
Michigan St. 58, Maryland 55	
Navy 68, American 60	
Queens (NY) 78, Dist. of Columbia 68	
Roberts Wesleyan 69, D’Youville 55	
Saint Joseph’s 75, St. Bonaventure 64	
Seton Hill 77, Pitt.-Johnstown 62	
Shepherd 58, Shippensburg 46	
Slippery Rock 83, Edinboro 81	
St. Thomas Aquinas 87, Goldey-Beacom 84	
Staten Island 96, Molloy 92	
Syracuse 74, NC State 60	
Temple 73, South Florida 71	
UConn 93, Georgetown 79	
Villanova 59, Seton Hall 54	
W. Virginia St. 112, Concord 111, 3OT	
West Chester 75, Millersville 70	
West Liberty 162, Salem International 106	
Wheeling Jesuit 82, Point Park 62	
SOUTH	
Arkansas St. 83, Louisiana-Lafayette 64	
Auburn 106, Mississippi 76	
Barton 94, Chowan 72	
Clark Atlanta 73, Allen 66	
Clemson 83, Notre Dame 68	
Coastal Carolina 80, Georgia St. 74	
Columbus St. 83, South Carolina Beau- fort Sand Sharks 72	
Davis & Elkins 91, Frostburg St. 85	
E. Kentucky 86, North Florida 81	
ETSU 59, Mercer 58	
Fayetteville St. 69, Virginia Union 66	
Flagler 83, Lander 80	
Florida Gulf Coast 80, Bellarmine 61	
Florida Southern 93, Rollins 79	
Fort Valley St. 78, Edward Waters 75	
Furman 85, The Citadel 42	
George Mason 74, Fordham 64	
Georgia Southwestern 71, Clayton St. 64	
High Point 88, SC-Upstate 66	
Jacksonville 79, Stetson 72	
Johnson C. Smith 83, Elizabeth City St. 75	
King (Tenn.) 83, Converse 75	
Lane 77, Central St. (Ohio) 58	
Lees-McRae 76, Belmont Abbey 60	
Lenoir-Rhyne 82, Catawba 67	
Lincoln Memorial 95, Carson-Newman 85	
Lipscomb 78, Cent. Arkansas 60	
Lynn 99, St. Leo 85	
Memphis 84, Rice 72	
Miles 79, Kentucky St. 50	
Morehouse 71, Benedict 60	
Newberry 78, Anderson (SC) 73	
North Alabama 74, Queens (NC) 69	
North Greenville 92, Francis Marion 78	
Palm Beach Atlantic 97, Florida Tech 84	
Presbyterian 64, UNC-Asheville 59	
Radford 63, Gardner-Webb 56	
SC-Aiken 76, North Georgia 62	
Savannah St. 75, Albany St. (Ga.) 53	
Shorter 97, Southern Wesleyan 92	
South Alabama 88, Southern Miss. 82	
Spring Hill 68, LeMoyné-Owen 63	
Tampa 97, Barry 62	
Tulane 78, Charlotte 64	
UCF 80, Kansas St. 76	
UNC-Pembroke 106, Mount Olive 70	
Virginia 83, Wake Forest 75	
Virginia St. 78, Bowie St. 72	
Virginia-Wise 121, Tusculum 115, 3OT	
West Georgia 73, Austin Peay 70	
Wingate 87, Coker 85	
Wofford 90, W. Carolina 67	
Young Harris 73, Erskine 72	
MIDWEST	
Augustana (SD) 74, Minn. Duluth 63	
Belmont 74, Missouri St. 65	
Bradley 76, Valparaiso 65	
Creighton 75, DePaul 65	
Drake 65, Evansville 61	
Emporia St. 95, Missouri Western 85	
Fort Hays St. 79, Neb.-Kearney 57	
Indiana 83, Penn St. 78	
Loyola Chicago 77, George Washington 57	
Minot St. 81, Sioux Falls 56	
N. Dakota St. 82, South Dakota 78	
N. Iowa 74, Ill.-Chicago 52	
St. Cloud St. 68, Bemidji St. 60	
St. John’s 76, Butler 70	
Washburn 71, Pittsburg St. 61	
Winona St. 63, Wayne St. (Neb.) 59	
SOUTHWEST	
Arkansas 86, Texas 81, OT	
Kentucky 83, Oklahoma 82	
Nova Southeastern 103, Embry-Riddle (AZ) 88	
Rogers St. 81, Northeastern St. 74	
St Edwards 80, St. Mary’s (Texas) 73	
Vanderbilt 86, Texas A&M 84	
FAR WEST	
Arizona 83, Utah 66	
BYU 91, Arizona St. 81	
Boise St. 82, Utah St. 65	
Ohio St. 87, Southern Cal 82	
SMU 81, California 77	
San Francisco 74, Oregon St. 72	
Stanford 78, Boston College 60	
Men’s Top 25 schedule	
Thursday’s games	
No. 15 Michigan (21-6) vs. Rutgers (14-14)	
No. 23 Saint Mary’s (Cal.) (25-4) at Loyola Marymount (16-13)	
Friday’s game	
No. 20 Purdue (19-9) vs. UCLA (20-8)	
Saturday’s games	
No. 1 Auburn (25-2) at No. 17 Kentucky (18-9)	
No. 2 Duke (25-3) vs. Florida St. (16-12)	
No. 3 Florida (24-4) vs. No. 12 Texas A&M (20-7)	
No. 4 Houston (24-4) vs. Cincinnati (17-11)	
No. 5 Tennessee (23-5) vs. No. 6 Alabama (23-5)	
No. 7 St. John’s (24-4) vs. Seton Hall (7-20)	
No. 9 Iowa St. (21-7) vs. No. 22 Arizona (18-9)	
No. 10 Texas Tech (21-7) at Kansas (19-9)	
No. 13 Clemson (22-5) at Virginia (13-14)	
No. 14 Missouri (21-7) at Vanderbilt (18-9)	
No. 16 Maryland (21-6) at Penn St. (15-13)	
No. 19 Louisville (22-6) vs. Pittsburgh (16-12)	
No. 21 Marquette (21-7) at Georgetown (16-11)	
No. 23 Saint Mary’s (Cal.) (25-4) vs. Oregon St. (20-9)	
No. 24 Mississippi St. (19-9) vs. LSU (14-14)	
No. 25 BYU (19-8) vs. West Virginia (17-11)	
Sunday’s games	
No. 8 Michigan St. (22-5) vs. No. 11 Wisconsin (22-6)	
No. 15 Michigan (21-6) vs. Illinois (18-11)	
No. 18 Memphis (22-5) at UAB (18-9)	
Wednesday women’s scores	
EAST	
Army 75, Lafayette 48	
Boston U. 80, Lehigh 68	
Bucknell 79, Loyola (Md.) 45	
Duquesne 74, St. Bonaventure 48	
Fordham 72, La Salle 51	
Holy Cross 59, Colgate 55	
Marshall 73, Louisiana-Monroe 65	
Md.-Eastern Shore 67, NC Central 57	
Navy 88, American 60	
Robert Morris 76, Youngstown St. 53	
St. John’s 83, Georgetown 49	
UMass 61, George Washington 55	
Villanova 56, Butler 54	
West Virginia 75, Utah 46	
SOUTH	
Arkansas St. 56, Southern Miss. 55	
East Carolina 80, FAU 70	
Georgia Southern 57, Appalachian St. 55	
High Point 72, SC-Upstate 47	
James Madison 80, Georgia St. 74	
Longwood 59, Winthrop 55	
Louisiana-Lafayette 55, South Alabama 48	
Loyola Chicago 52, VCU 50	
Old Dominion 81, Coastal Carolina 65	
Radford 80, Gardner-Webb 78	
Richmond 59, Davidson 46	
Troy 86, Texas St. 67	
UNC-Asheville 67, Presbyterian 60	
MIDWEST	
Ball St. 60, Cent. Michigan 58, OT	
Bowling Green 91, Ohio 61	
Cleveland St. 81, Wright St. 46	
Dayton 74, Saint Joseph’s 65	
IUPUI 80, Oakland 66	
Iowa 79, Michigan 66	
Kent St. 76, N. Illinois 58	
Miami (Ohio) 82, E. Michigan 72, OT	
Ohio St. 89, Michigan St. 78	
Saint Louis 67, Rhode Island 63	
St. Thomas (MN) 79, Oral Roberts 76	
Toledo 71, Buffalo 68	
UCLA 91, Wisconsin 61	
W. Michigan 77, Akron 66	
Washington 72, Minnesota 62	
SOUTHWEST	
North Texas 67, Charlotte 58	
Oklahoma St. 74, Cincinnati 64	
TCU 91, Houston 56	
Tulsa 66, South Florida 58	
FAR WEST	
Colorado 89, Arizona St. 54	
Colorado St. 61, Nevada 45	
San Diego St. 66, Air Force 63	
UNLV 83, Boise St. 53	
Utah St. 82, San Jose St. 75	
Wyoming 59, New Mexico 40	
Women’s Top 25 schedule	
Saturday’s games	
No. 2 UCLA (26-1) vs. No. 4 Southern Cal (25-2)	
No. 18 West Virginia (21-6) at Cincinnati (15-11)	
No. 23 Michigan St. (20-7) vs. Minnesota (20-8)	
Sunday’s games	
No. 1 Texas (27-2) vs. Florida (14-14)	
No. 3 Notre Dame (24-3) vs. No. 25 Louisville (19-8)	
No. 5 UConn (26-3) vs. Marquette (19-8)	
No. 6 South Carolina (25-3) vs. No. 15 Kentucky (21-5)	
No. 7 LSU (27-2) vs. Mississippi (18-8)	
No. 8 North Carolina (25-4) vs. Virginia (14-14)	
No. 9 NC State (22-5) at SMU (10-18)	
No. 10 TCU (26-3) at No. 17 Baylor (25-5)	
No. 11 Tennessee (21-6) vs. Georgia (10-18)	
No. 12 Ohio St. (23-4) at No. 19 Maryland (21-6)	
No. 13 Oklahoma (21-6) vs. No. 20 Alabama (22-6)	
No. 14 Kansas St. (25-5) at Iowa St. (20-10)	
No. 16 Duke (21-7) at No. 24 Florida St. (22-6)	
No. 21 Oklahoma St. (22-5) at Kansas (16-12)	
No. 22 Creighton (23-4) vs. Villanova (16-12)	

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball National League

ATLANTA BRAVES — Reassigned RHP Enoli Paredes and RHP Royber Salinas to minor league camp. Optioned RHPs Davis Daniel and Amos Willingham to Gwinnett (IL).

CHICAGO CUBS — Optioned OF Owen Caissie to Iowa (IL). Reassigned OF Brett Bateman and RHPs Brandon Birdsell and Antonio Santos to minor league camp.

BASKETBALL

National Basketball Association

DETROIT PISTONS — Recalled F Bobi Klintman from the Motor City Cruise of the G League.

NEW YORK KNICKS — Recalled F Pacome Dadiet and G Tyler Kolek from the Westchester Knicks of the G League.

Women's National Basketball Association

MINNESOTA LYNX — Signed G Christyn Williams to a training camp contract.

HOCKEY

National Hockey League

COLORADO AVALANCHE — Activated RW Valeri Nichushkin from injured reserve.

EDMONTON OILERS — Claimed D Travis Dermott off waivers from the Minnesota Wild and reassigned him to Bakersfield (AHL).

FLORIDA PANTHERS — Reassigned RW Justin Sourdif to Charlotte (AHL).

MINNESOTA WILD — Acquired F Tyler Madden from Los Angeles in exchange for D Joseph Cecconi.

NASHVILLE PREDATORS — Acquired F Jesse Ylonen from the Tampa Bay Lightning in exchange for F Anthony Angello.

NEW YORK ISLANDERS — Transferred C Mathew Barzal to long-term injured reserve.

NEW YORK RANGERS — Recalled D Matthew Robertson from Hartford (AHL). Placed D Adam Fox on injured reserve.

OTTAWA SENATORS — Recalled LW Angus Crookshank and C Jan Jenik from Belleville (AHL).

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Waived LW Matt Nieto.

SEATTLE KRAKEN — Reassigned C Mitchell Stephens to Coachella Valley (AHL).

TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING — Reassigned G Matt Tomkins to Syracuse (AHL).

WINNIPEG JETS — Recalled C Jaret Anderson-Dolan from Manitoba (AHL).

SOCCER

Major League Soccer

D.C. UNITED — Signed F Fidel Barajas on loan from Chivas Guadalajara (Liga MX) through June 30, 2025, with an option to extend the loan through Dec. 31, 2025.

FC DALLAS — Placed D Geovane Jesus on the season-ending injury list.

SAN DIEGO FC — Acquired D Luca Bombino from LAFC for a 2025 international roster spot.

VANCOUVER WHITECAPS FC — Signed F Brian White to a contract extension through 2027.

MLS Next Pro

HOUSTON DYNAMO 2 — Signed D Felipe Andrade to a one-year loan with an option to buy from Fluminense Football Club (Campeonato Brasileiro Serie A) and G Pedro Cruz on a full transfer from Futebol Clube Ska Brasil (Campeonato Paulista Segunda Divisao).

NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION II — Traded one 2025 MLS NEXT Pro International Roster Slot to Huntsville City FC in exchange for an undisclosed fee.

PHILADELPHIA UNION II — Signed Philadelphia Union Academy MF Willyam Ferreira to an MLS NEXT Pro professional contract.

TENNIS

Dubai Duty Free Championships

Wednesday

At Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Purse: \$3,237,670

Surface: Hardcourt outdoor

Seedings in parentheses

Men's Singles

Round of 16

Marin Cilic, Croatia, def. Alexei Popyrin, Australia, 5-7, 6-3, 6-4.

Felix Auger-Aliassime, Canada, def. Nuno Borges, Portugal, 4-6, 6-3, 7-5.

Luca Nardi, Italy, def. Zizou Bergs, Belgium, 6-4, 7-6 (3).

Tallon Griekspoor, Netherlands, def. Ugo Humbert (5), France, 4-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Quentin Halys, France, def. Roberto Bautista Agut, Spain, 7-6 (5), 6-4.

Daniil Medvedev (1), Russia, def. Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard, France, 6-4, 6-4.

Matteo Berrettini, Italy, def. Christopher O'Connell, Australia, 7-6 (2), 6-2.

Stefanos Tsitsipas (4), Greece, def. Karen Khachanov, Russia, 7-6 (4), 2-6, 6-4.

Chile Open

Wednesday

At Santiago, Chile

Purse: \$680,140

Surface: Red clay

Seedings in parentheses

Men's Singles

Round of 16

Laslo Djere, Serbia, def. Pedro Martinez (4), Spain, 6-1, 6-4.

Jaime Faria, Portugal, def. Gustavo Heide, Brazil, 6-7 (2), 7-6 (5), 6-4.

Francisco Cerundolo (1), Argentina, def.

Yannick Hanfmann, Germany, 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 (5).

Tomas Martin Etcheverry (5), Argentina, def. Cristian Garin, Chile, 6-2, 6-4.

ATX Open

Wednesday

At Austin, TX

Purse: \$275,094

Surface: Hardcourt outdoor

Seedings in parentheses

Women's Singles

Round of 16

Anna Blinkova, Russia, def. Tatjana Maria, Germany, 6-2, 6-2.

Jessica Pegula (1), United States, def. Nuria Parrizas Diaz, Spain, 6-1, 6-3.

Ajla Tomljanovic, Australia, def. Jodie Burrage, Britain, 4-6, 6-3, 6-0.

Ena Shibahara, Japan, def. Kimberly Birrell, Australia, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4.

Merida Open

Wednesday

At Merida, Mexico

Purse: \$1,064,510

Surface: Hardcourt outdoor

Seedings in parentheses

Women's Singles

Round of 16

Daria Saville, Australia, def. Anhelina Kalinina, Ukraine, 4-6, 6-2, 6-2.

Elina Avanesyan, Russia, def. Jessica Bouzas Maneiro, Spain, 6-1, 6-4.

Maya Joint, Australia, def. Donna Vekic (5), Croatia, 6-1, 6-2.

Paula Badosa (2), Spain, def. Jaqueline Cristian, Romania, 6-2, 6-1.

PRO SOCCER
MLS
Eastern Conference
W L T Pts GF GA
Columbus 1 0 0 3 4 2
Philadelphia 1 0 0 3 4 2
Atlanta 1 0 0 3 3 2
Cincinnati 1 0 0 3 1 0
Charlotte FC 0 0 1 1 2 2
D.C. United 0 0 1 1 2 2
Inter Miami CF 0 0 1 1 2 2
NYC FC 0 0 1 1 2 2
Toronto FC 0 0 1 1 2 2
Nashville 0 0 1 1 0 0
New England 0 0 1 1 0 0
CF Montréal 0 1 0 0 2 3
New York 0 1 0 0 0 1
Chicago 0 1 0 0 2 4
Orlando City 0 1 0 0 2 4
Western Conference
W L T Pts GF GA
San Jose 1 0 0 3 4 0
Vancouver 1 0 0 3 4 1
San Diego FC 1 0 0 3 2 0
FC Dallas 1 0 0 3 2 1
Austin FC 1 0 0 3 1 0
LAFC 1 0 0 3 1 0
Seattle 0 0 1 1 2 2
Colorado 0 0 1 1 0 0
St Louis City 0 0 1 1 0 0
Houston 0 1 0 0 1 2
Minn, United 0 1 0 0 0 1
Sporting KC 0 1 0 0 0 1
LA Galaxy 0 1 0 0 0 2
Portland 0 1 0 0 1 4
Real Salt Lake 0 1 0 0 0 4

**Note:** Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Saturday, February 22
Los Angeles FC 1, Minnesota 0
New York City FC 2, Miami 2, tie
Atlanta 3, CF Montréal 2
Cincinnati 1, New York 0
Columbus 4, Chicago 2
Toronto FC 2, D.C. United 2, tie
Philadelphia 4, Orlando City 2
Austin FC 1, Sporting Kansas City 0
FC Dallas 2, Houston 1
New England 0, Nashville 0, tie
Colorado 0, St Louis City 0, tie
San Jose 4, Real Salt Lake 0
Charlotte FC 2, Seattle 2, tie

Sunday, February 23
Vancouver 4, Portland 1
San Diego FC 2, LA Galaxy 0

Saturday, March 1
Atlanta at Charlotte FC
Seattle at Real Salt Lake
Columbus at New England
Nashville at New York
Toronto FC at Orlando City
Cincinnati at Philadelphia
D.C. United at Chicago
San Jose at Sporting Kansas City
CF Montréal at Minnesota
FC Dallas at Colorado
New York City FC at Los Angeles FC
Austin FC at Portland
St Louis City at San Diego FC

Sunday, March 2
LA Galaxy at Vancouver
Miami at Houston

## SHEBELIEVES CUP

# Japan ends US streak for title win

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Toko Koga scored early in the second half and Japan handed the United States its first loss under coach Emma Hayes with a 2-1 victory Wednesday night in the SheBelieves Cup title game.

The Americans had not lost since last February when they fell 2-0 to Mexico in the CONCACAF W Gold Cup. The loss also snapped the U.S. team’s string of five titles in the SheBelieves Cup, now in its 10th year.

The U.S. and Japan were both undefeated in the tournament heading into the final match at Snapdragon Stadium.

“Of course we want to win. No one wants to lose these things,” Hayes said. “But we didn’t put out our most experienced team. We put out a team we’re hoping to develop, and our goals go beyond just the SheBelieves.”

The U.S. had been unbeaten in the last 14 games against Japan. The Americans’ last loss to Japan came in 2012.

Japan took the early lead with Yuka Momiki’s goal in the second minute. But Ally Sentnor tied it for the U.S. in the 14th with an assist from Catarina Macario.

Sentnor, the U.S. Soccer Young Player of the Year, has scored in both her starts for the team.

Japan pulled back in front on Koga’s goal in the 50th minute. She had come into the match as a second-half substitute.

“They were a higher level to us throughout the whole evening,” said Hayes, now 15-1-2 as the U.S. coach.

Hayes, who took over the team late last May and led the team to a gold medal at the Paris Olympics, made 10 changes to the roster she used in a 2-1 victory over Australia on Sunday.

The U.S. team was playing in the tournament without the trio of Mallory Swanson, Trinity Rodman and Sophia (Smith) Wilson. Rodman is rehabbing a back injury, Smith was not yet in game form and Swanson was out for personal commitments.

“I’d love to have all of our top players available, I want that, but I can only pick the players that are available,” Hayes said. “I think you want to learn this lesson now. This is the game I really wanted for us to really see where players who have played less than five matches for the national team, what’s really missing for them, whether its in possession or out of possession.”



AROUND THE NBA

Debate continues on value of 2-pointer

BY TIM REYNOLDS  
 Associated Press

The NBA is on the cusp of accomplishing something that it hasn't seen before. The jury's still out on whether it's a good thing.

With about seven weeks left in the season, 2-point shots are accounting for 49% of scoring. And if that stat holds up — there's no indication it won't — this will be the first season in which 2-pointers make up less than half of the league's point production.

The current breakdown: a record-low 49% of scoring comes from 2-pointers, a record-high 36% comes from 3-pointers and a near-record-low 15% comes from the foul line. Those numbers are just more proof of how the 3-point shot has continued to permeate the game, and that's why plenty of people are wondering aloud if the league has a real problem on its hands.

"I don't have any problem with guys and teams shooting a lot of 3s," said Golden State's Stephen Curry, the league's all-time leader in 3-pointers and someone closing in on 4,000 such makes for his regular-season career. "Obviously, that's the way that I play, and I love that factor in the game. But you've also got to put the work in behind the scenes to take full advantage of it."

This isn't a new phenomenon. Barring some sort of major shift in how the game is played over the next seven weeks, the league is on pace to break the record for 3-pointers in a season (it'll be the 15th consecutive season in which the 3s-per-game record falls) and 3-pointers attempted in a season (a new mark will be set there for the 19th time in the last 22 seasons).

Boston is leading the 3-point assault this year, though the Celtics are hardly the only 3-happy team. But the defending NBA champions are clearly more reliant on the shot than anyone else, with 46% of their points this season coming from beyond the arc. They'll almost certainly become only the third team in NBA history to finish a season with more points from 3s than 2s, joining the 2018-19 Houston Rockets and 2020-21 Utah Jazz.

"Everybody can't play the same way," Celtics All-Star forward and two-time Olympic gold medalist Jayson Tatum said. "You've got to have the right personnel. But, you know, the way we play works for us. So we play to our strengths."

The Celtics are the only franchise in NBA history to have eight different players make 100 3s in a season; they've done it in each of the last two seasons and are on



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry makes a 3-pointer against the Charlotte Hornets in San Francisco on Tuesday. As the NBA's all-time leader in 3-pointers, Curry has helped cause a further decline in 2-pointers.

pace to do it again this year. For them, the 3-pointer is the golden ticket; they're 33-6 this season when they make at least 17 3s, and just 8-10 when they don't make that many.

They had five 3-point shooters on the floor together last season and the result was an NBA championship. It was, at times, impossible to guard. Golden State rode the brilliance of Curry and Klay Thompson to four NBA titles in their years as the Warriors' "Splash Brothers," a duo that helped usher in a new era of 3-point reliance. And the math is simple: shooting 40% on 3s gets you more points per attempt than shooting 50% on 2s does.

"Right now, I think the defense has to catch up and maybe NBA teams will shoot less 3s," San Antonio star Victor Wembanyama said at the All-Star break, before he was shut down for the year with deep vein thrombosis in his right

shoulder. "But analytics back it up, so it makes sense."

Wembanyama was averaging 8.8 3-point tries per game this season, the most of any center in the league, and his 403 attempts on the season from beyond the arc is still more as of Thursday than some of the game's best shooters — a list of players that includes Phoenix's Devin Booker, the Los Angeles Lakers' Austin Reaves and Miami's Duncan Robinson.

But the numbers say it's a good shot, so Wembanyama took them. A lot of them. The Spurs, for years, were a team that didn't prioritize the 3-pointer. And now, it's a weapon for them and everyone else in the league.

"The game has evolved," said Golden State coach Steve Kerr, an elite shooter in his playing days.

It keeps evolving. Commissioner Adam Silver said earlier this month that he listened to an off-the-record conversation between

Kerr and broadcaster Bob Costas at the tech summit during All-Star weekend, the keynote address of sorts for those who were invited to that event. Silver later shared that Kerr conceded there may be a bit too much 3-point shooting in today's NBA, but that he liked the current state of the game and wouldn't recommend any changes.

Silver thinks it's all cyclical. He said when the All-Star weekend last came to the Bay Area in 2000, "many people were saying it was too physical, we were too dependent on the dunk, that players weren't sufficiently skilled as they were than in the old days."

It's all very different now. "The fact now that you can't play in this league unless you can shoot, that even 7-footers have to be able to shoot these days and have to be able to shoot at long range, I actually think that's a beautiful thing," Silver said.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	42	17	.712	—
New York	38	20	.655	3½
Brooklyn	21	37	.362	20½
Philadelphia	20	38	.345	21½
Toronto	18	41	.305	24
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	29	31	.483	—
Miami	27	30	.474	½
Atlanta	27	32	.458	1½
Charlotte	14	43	.246	13½
Washington	10	48	.172	18
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	48	10	.828	—
Indiana	33	24	.579	14½
Milwaukee	32	25	.561	15½
Detroit	33	26	.559	15½
Chicago	23	36	.390	25½
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	38	20	.655	—
Houston	37	22	.627	1½
Dallas	31	28	.525	7½
San Antonio	24	33	.421	13½
New Orleans	15	43	.259	23
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	47	11	.810	—
Denver	38	20	.655	9
Minnesota	32	27	.542	15½
Portland	26	33	.441	21½
Utah	14	44	.241	33
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	35	21	.625	—
L.A. Clippers	32	26	.552	4
Golden State	31	27	.534	5
Sacramento	30	28	.517	6
Phoenix	27	31	.466	9

Wednesday's games

Detroit 117, Boston 97  
 Indiana 111, Toronto 91  
 New York 110, Philadelphia 105  
 Portland 129, Washington 121  
 Miami 131, Atlanta 109  
 Oklahoma City 129, Brooklyn 121  
 L.A. Clippers 122, Chicago 117  
 Sacramento 118, Utah 101  
 Houston 118, San Antonio 106

Thursday's games

Golden State at Orlando  
 Denver at Milwaukee  
 Charlotte at Dallas  
 New Orleans at Phoenix  
 Minnesota at L.A. Lakers

Friday's games

Denver at Detroit  
 Cleveland at Boston  
 Oklahoma City at Atlanta  
 Portland at Brooklyn  
 Indiana at Miami  
 New York at Memphis  
 Toronto at Chicago  
 New Orleans at Phoenix  
 Minnesota at Utah  
 L.A. Clippers at L.A. Lakers

Saturday's games

Washington at Charlotte  
 Brooklyn at Detroit  
 Sacramento at Houston  
 San Antonio at Memphis  
 Golden State at Philadelphia  
 Milwaukee at Dallas

Sunday's games

Denver at Boston  
 Portland at Cleveland  
 Chicago at Indiana  
 New York at Miami  
 Toronto at Orlando  
 Oklahoma City at San Antonio  
 New Orleans at Utah  
 L.A. Clippers at L.A. Lakers  
 Minnesota at Phoenix

Scoring leaders

Through Wednesday

	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Gil-Alex., OKC	57	634	459	1844	32.4
Antetokoun., MIL	45	557	272	1393	31.0
Jokic, DEN	52	578	256	1517	29.2
Edwards, MIN	57	520	290	1566	27.5
Maxey, PHI	50	473	253	1359	27.2
Durant, PHO	45	439	227	1211	26.9
Tatum, BOS	56	505	281	1492	26.6
Booker, PHO	52	449	327	1361	26.2
Brunson, NY	57	513	329	1488	26.1
Davis, DAL	43	410	257	1107	25.7
Cunningham, DET	54	517	228	1387	25.7



NHL

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Toronto	58	36	20	2	74	185	165
Florida	59	35	21	3	73	197	168
Tampa Bay	57	33	20	4	70	205	155
Detroit	58	30	22	6	66	171	181
Ottawa	58	29	25	4	62	161	165
Boston	59	27	24	8	62	163	190
Montreal	58	27	26	5	59	172	196
Buffalo	56	24	27	5	53	182	189

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	58	38	12	8	84	212	149
Carolina	58	33	21	4	70	187	164
New Jersey	60	32	22	6	70	183	151
Columbus	58	28	22	8	64	195	191
N.Y. Rangers	58	29	25	4	62	177	180
Philadelphia	59	26	26	7	59	174	196
N.Y. Islanders	57	25	25	7	57	156	171
Pittsburgh	60	23	28	9	55	171	220

Western Conference

Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	59	42	14	3	87	212	139
Dallas	58	37	19	2	76	194	150
Minnesota	58	34	20	4	72	169	165
Colorado	60	34	24	2	70	193	180
Utah	59	26	24	9	61	165	177
St. Louis	59	27	26	6	60	167	178
Nashville	57	20	30	7	47	147	189
Chicago	58	17	34	7	41	153	203

Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	58	34	18	6	74	190	161
Edmonton	58	34	20	4	72	189	169
Los Angeles	56	31	17	8	70	163	144
Vancouver	58	27	20	11	65	160	173
Calgary	57	28	21	8	64	154	168
Anaheim	57	25	25	7	57	146	175
Seattle	60	25	31	4	54	174	195
San Jose	59	15	36	8	38	151	221

**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**

Winnipeg 4, Ottawa 1  
 Colorado 5, New Jersey 1  
 Vancouver 3, Los Angeles 2, OT

**Thursday's games**

Buffalo at Carolina  
 Calgary at Tampa Bay  
 Columbus at Detroit  
 Edmonton at Florida  
 N.Y. Islanders at Boston  
 San Jose at Montreal  
 St. Louis at Washington  
 Philadelphia at Pittsburgh  
 Winnipeg at Nashville  
 Minnesota at Utah  
 Chicago at Vegas  
 Vancouver at Anaheim

**Friday's games**

Toronto at N.Y. Rangers  
 Los Angeles at Dallas  
 Minnesota at Colorado

**Saturday's games**

Nashville at N.Y. Islanders  
 Tampa Bay at Washington  
 Boston at Pittsburgh  
 Calgary at Florida  
 Detroit vs. Columbus at Ohio Stadium  
 Edmonton at Carolina  
 Montreal at Buffalo  
 Philadelphia at Winnipeg  
 San Jose at Ottawa  
 Los Angeles at St. Louis  
 New Jersey at Utah  
 Chicago at Anaheim  
 Vancouver at Seattle

**Sunday's games**

Toronto at Pittsburgh  
 Boston at Minnesota  
 Calgary at Carolina  
 St. Louis at Dallas  
 Nashville at N.Y. Rangers  
 New Jersey at Vegas

**Scoring leaders**

**Through Wednesday**

	GP	G	A	PTS
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	60	23	67	90
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	58	43	44	87
Nikita Kucherov, TB	54	26	59	85
Mitch Marner, TOR	57	18	55	73
Connor McDavid, EDM	52	22	51	73
Kyle Connor, WPG	59	31	42	73
David Pastrnak, BOS	59	30	42	72
Jack Eichel, LV	57	19	50	69
Jack Hughes, NJ	60	27	42	69
Jesper Bratt, NJ	60	17	51	68

Three teams fighting for Pacific title

BY MARK ANDERSON  
*Associated Press*

LAS VEGAS — The Vegas Golden Knights spent the first part of the season taking control of the Pacific Division, only to play so-so hockey in January and let the Edmonton Oilers to catch them.

Now neither team seems to want to win the division, allowing the Los Angeles Kings to creep close enough to make it more of a three-team race.

Vegas and Edmonton could still turn it into a two-team duel the Pacific appeared destined to be not that long ago. Given each club has represented the Western Conference in the Stanley Cup Final the past two seasons, those veteran teams have shown they know how to handle this time of year.

“We’ve been there, we’ve done it before,” Golden Knights center Brett Howden said. “Last year, we had a first-round exit, but we had to play well to make sure we got in the playoffs. The year before that, we clinched first place in our division in the last game of the season. So, yeah, we know how to play this time of year.”

Vegas has 74 points, two more than the Oilers. The Kings had 69 points entering Wednesday night’s game against Vancouver. Winnipeg, with 85 points through Tuesday, appears to be running away for the race for the conference’s top seed.

The Pacific Division race didn’t appear it would be this close when the Golden Knights went 10-2 in December to take a six-point lead over Edmonton and Los Angeles. But then Vegas went 6-6-3 in January, and the Golden Knights and Oilers each had 68 points and what should have been a commanding 10-point lead over the Kings.

“It’s a good thing we had a good start,” Vegas defenseman Brayden McNabb said. “You give yourself some leeway. You’re going to have tough stretches throughout the year. The year’s way too long. Not everything is going to go per-



ALEX GALLARDO/AP

Vegas Golden Knights left wing Pavel Dorofeyev controls the puck with Los Angeles Kings goalie Darcy Kuemper (35) and defenseman Drew Doughty defending during the first period in Los Angeles on Monday.

fect, but let’s go nip it in the bud.”

Nailing down the top seed would ensure home-ice advantage through at least the first two rounds of the playoffs. The Golden Knights had that edge throughout the postseason two years ago en route to winning the Stanley Cup championship.

Last season, they were the second wild card in the conference and lost their first-round series to Dallas in seven games.

“The first year, we came out of the (All-Star) break and we went on a tear,” Vegas coach Bruce Cassidy said. “Last year, we were uneven. This year, we’re uneven. I like our play a lot more this year than I do last year. I think we’ve played better than our record shows. We just haven’t sustained it for 60 (minutes) and some games have gotten away from us.

“I think our guys understand that. I think they know what it’s supposed to look like most nights.

Now we’ve got to make it look that way for longer stretches.”

Reigning Western Conference-champion Edmonton has lost three in a row out of the 4 Nations Face-Off break and four overall, in a midseason rut similar to what the Golden Knights are going through.

“Everybody knows how we can play, how good this group is when everybody’s playing the right way,” veteran winger Corey Perry said. “It just comes down to the little things, the little battles, the little moments. Those are not there right now and lacking. We’ll find it.”

The Oilers reached Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final last season after losing 10 of their first 13 games, firing Jay Woodcroft and finding that game under new coach Kris Knoblauch, who doesn’t want to lean too hard into that muscle memory.

“How well we handle adversity

also makes you a little more complacent,” Knoblauch said. “There’s not as much urgency to turn things around, because there’s so much confidence on, ‘It’ll be OK.’ It’s a fine line on being confident but also a little bit complacent or overconfident. There’s a lot of confidence in the team, and right now we’ve got to show a little more urgency to turn the switch.”

On the other side of the conference playoff race are teams trying to capture the final wild-card spot. The Canucks and Flames were separated by just a point through Tuesday.

“The reality is that we’re fighting with Vancouver and a couple other teams for that last playoff spot,” Calgary defenseman Rasmus Andersson said. “Unless one of the top teams really drops away, that’s our reality that we’re fighting for that seventh, eighth spot in the conference. That’s just the reality of it.”

Canucks get Hughes back just in time to top Kings

BY JOE REEDY  
*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — Quinn Hughes returned just in time for the Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday night.

The star defenseman had the primary assist on Conor Garland’s overtime goal as the Canucks defeated the Los Angeles Kings 3-2.

“He’s the leader in the room and on the ice. Obviously a big, big boost for us when we saw he was playing,” Garland said.

Last year’s Norris Trophy winner as the NHL’s top defenseman, Hughes returned after missing six games because of an undisclosed injury that also prevented him from playing for the United States in the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament.

“I can say I didn’t feel my best tonight, but I



Hughes

got through the game and hopefully can build off that,” he said.

Hughes, who played for the first time since Jan. 31, went through a strenuous morning skate to see if he was ready to go. He was back on the ice for pregame warmups, but did not take line rushes and stayed on the ice after the horn.

Hughes was initially listed as out on the roster report, but he convinced coach Rick Tocchet he could play. Hughes was changed to active eight minutes before the opening faceoff and was the last player to take the ice, with Vancouver going with seven defensemen.

“With 11 minutes left, we had a little bit of a

talk and he persuaded me. He said he wanted to play and the doctors thought it was safe,” Tocchet said.

Tocchet said the original plan was for Hughes to play 16 to 17 minutes. With the game going to overtime, though, it ended up being 21:38.

“I think with the back-to-back games and coming off the injury, I have got to be a little bit careful. I think I just felt good enough in warmups where I felt like I could play smart and get through the game,” Hughes said.

Hughes leads the Canucks in scoring with 60 points, and his 46 assists are the most among NHL defensemen. His return comes as Vancouver is fighting for a playoff spot. Wednesday night’s win put it one point ahead of Calgary for the second wild card in the Western Conference.



## MLB

# Improved roster gives A's optimism in Sacramento era

BY DAVID BRANDT  
Associated Press

MESA, Ariz. — The Athletics have moved about an hour east from Oakland to the Sacramento area, where they will be based in a minor league ballpark for the next three seasons while hoping a more permanent home in Las Vegas will be ready in 2028.

If this doesn't sound like the ideal situation for a Major League Baseball franchise, that's because it's not. But these vagabond A's enter their Sacramento era with something a little unexpected considering the circumstances: playoff expectations.

"It's different," slugger Brent Rooker said. "The emphasis is always on winning and that's always the main goal. But when you're playing at this level against this kind of competition, there's a certain barrier to entry in terms of you have to have good enough players, who have had enough success and confidence before that winning becomes realistic."

"Now we've reached that point."

The Athletics look to be a contender in the AL West, which doesn't have an obvious favorite. They were 69-93 last season and haven't made the playoffs since 2020, but were 32-32 after the All-Star break.

During the offseason, owner John Fisher did something that's been rare in the recent past — spend money. Rooker signed a \$60 million, five-year deal to stay with the franchise and the A's signed a quality starting pitcher in right-hander Luis Severino, who agreed to a \$67 million, three-year contract.

Last week, the Athletics extended manager Mark Kotsay in a deal that could keep him with the franchise through 2029.

"There's a sense of comfort for a lot of guys — we know who we are," outfielder JJ Bleday said. "I feel like everyone has their spots and that's a good thing to have. It's good to come into spring training and know it's yours to lose."

The core of position players includes Rooker, Bleday, outfielder



MATT YORK/AP

Athletics players run drills during a spring training workout Feb. 21 in Mesa, Ariz.

Lawrence Butler and catcher Shea Langeliers. Severino heads an intriguing rotation. Closer Mason Miller has one of baseball's best arms, throwing a major league high 510 pitches at 100 mph or more last year, 49.8% of his total.

Rooker's \$60 million deal might have been the most important move of the offseason. The 30-year-old didn't get established in the big leagues until 2023, when

he was a surprise All-Star. He was even better last season, finishing with a .293 batting average, 39 homers and 112 RBIs.

"The cool part of any success that I've had is that it puts me in a position to take on a leadership role in this clubhouse," Rooker said. "It's something I'm going to embrace and I'm going to try to make the very, very best of it."

The optimism around the A's is refreshing for players after a

tough few seasons. They were 60-102 in 2022 and 50-112 games in 2023 before a 19-win improvement last year.

"I think we're very capable of taking another step forward," Langeliers said. "We win 19 more games this year and we're competing for a wild-card spot. Realistically, the goal is competing in our division and then we'll see where we're at in August and September."

## Former players running team operations on the rise

BY JAY COHEN  
Associated Press

PEORIA, Ariz. — Shortly after his playing career ended, Jerry Dipoto took in a game at Wrigley Field with former big league manager Jim Fregosi. After a particularly nasty strikeout by Eric Gagne, Dipoto laughed.

Fregosi promptly slapped Dipoto on the back of his head.

"He said, 'I'm just going to remind you today. ... Don't ever forget how hard that it is to play,'" Dipoto recalled. "And that's what I think is the thing I remember most, and I think the benefit of the guys who have gone through it, is that they recognize that it is a really hard game."

That lesson stayed with Dipoto as he made his way to his current job with the Seattle Mariners — and membership in an exclusive club. Dipoto is one of five former major leaguers serving as the top baseball executive for a big league franchise at the moment.

Dipoto, 56, has been the president of baseball operations for Seattle since Sept. 1, 2021. Like Dipoto, Chris Young, 45, was promoted from general manager to president of baseball operations for the Texas Rangers on Sept. 13. Craig Breslow was hired as the chief baseball officer for the Bos-



GERALD HERBERT/AP

The signing of Alex Bregman, left, is the latest highlight for former pitcher and current Red Sox chief baseball officer Craig Breslow, one of several former players now leading operations for an MLB team.

ton Red Sox on Oct. 25, 2023, and Chris Getz was promoted to GM of the Chicago White Sox on Aug. 31, 2023.

Buster Posey, 37, joined the list when the former All-Star catcher was hired as president of baseball operations for the San Francisco Giants in September.

"There are a ton of incredibly successful executives who didn't play baseball," said Breslow, 44. "I don't think it's a prerequisite,

but I do think it provides a level of credibility and empathy given I've kind of been on every side of a transaction, or every side of a conversation I've had to have with a player or coach. And credibility in terms of really being able to understand what players are thinking about, what they're going through."

Under Breslow's leadership, Boston used a complicated contract structure to add Alex Breg-

man in free agency. Bregman was also being pursued by the Cubs and Tigers before he agreed to a \$120 million, three-year deal with the Red Sox.

San Francisco had been struggling to land a major free agent before shortstop Willy Adames agreed to a \$182 million, seven-year contract with the Giants in December. Adames said Posey played a major role in his decision.

"My meeting with the team, it was me and him, basically. No agent. Nobody," Adames said. "So we had a really, really good conversation, and I bought into his plan for this organization, for what he wants to build here in the near future."

Breslow has a degree from Yale and Young graduated from Princeton, so the five players in charge of major league teams doesn't exactly represent some sort of counterrevolution when it comes to Ivy League grads in baseball.

But today's major leaguers are increasingly savvy when it comes to the business side of the game, and they have firsthand experience with the data used by front offices as part of their decision-making process.

"Where we were a decade ago to where we are now, there's just so much opportunity to make better

decisions nowadays based on the information that we have," said Getz, 41. "But being well-versed in it now, you know having a former playing background is only going to position you, your résumé is just stronger."

There are several more people in position to join the club one day. Brandon Gomes helped the Los Angeles Dodgers win the World Series last year, serving as the team's GM under Andrew Friedman. Ryan Garko was promoted to assistant GM with Detroit in May. Cole Figueroa is an assistant GM for the Rangers.

Kevin Reese and Tim Naehring work for longtime New York Yankees general manager Brian Cashman, and Josh Barfield is part of Getz's front office with the White Sox.

When it comes to his discussions with players interested in working in baseball operations, Breslow said the conversations provide an indication of the potential for success.

"It becomes pretty clear, generally who has the curiosity, who asks a lot of questions," he said. "Who wants to learn why we make decisions not just what decisions are being made. Those are the people (that could make the transition)."



AUTO RACING

NASCAR stars visit Mexico City, promote race

By JENNA FRYER  
Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — Daniel Suarez led a quartet of NASCAR stars through the streets of Mexico City, after midnight, in search of a nightcap following a full day of showcasing his native country to his fellow competitors.

NASCAR will hold its first points-paying international Cup Series race in modern history in June when it competes at the Autodromo Hermanos Rodríguez, one of the most popular stops on the Formula One calendar. It will be the first time since 1958 and only the third time in 77 years that NASCAR's top series will run an event that counts in the championship outside of the United States.

When the announcement was made last August it was met with excitement. But as the 2025 season has started, rumors have floated through the industry that the race may not even happen, questions about security and safety have been asked, and many weekly attendees have declared they won't be going to Mexico City.

NASCAR hasn't waffled once on this venture — it has a two-year contract with promoter OCESA, which also hosts the F1 race and other large-scale entertainment events across the country — and made a two-day tour this week through the city to promote Thursday's opening of ticket sales. The opening price for a three-day general admission ticket is about \$50.

What this week's visit did for NASCAR was give four of its top drivers a chance to experience the culture of Mexico City, witness the first-class promotional efforts of OCESA and see firsthand the excitement locals have for the top motorsports series in the U.S.

Suarez was joined by former series champions Ryan Blaney and Chase Elliott, as well as Christopher Bell, last weekend's race winner. The group had an immersive experience that included a track walk, taco tasting, a night at Lucha Libre wrestling — where Blaney and Suarez both tried some moves in the ring — and a Wednesday news conference that drew hundreds.

"I don't think many people actually real-

ize how special this is for me because it's not every day that I get to show these guys my home, my culture," Suarez told The Associated Press. "Everyone has an idea — they've been to Cancun or somewhere like that. But to come to Mexico City and to take them to very authentic places and see the city, it's just been amazing to show them what they are going to experience in June."

For OCESA, the visit was a feeler for the market demand for NASCAR, which ran in Mexico City with the second-tier Xfinity Series from 2005 to 2008. Tickets for this year's F1 race sold out in a day, but OCESA is in a contract year with Formula One Management and is juggling both F1 extension negotiations and the relaunch of NASCAR.

Those pressing matters have put talks with IndyCar for a 2026 event on pause as the promoters wait to see if Mexico City has an appetite and ability to afford multiple racing series.

But for NASCAR, this week's visit was a chance for its drivers to spread a positive message when they return to the garage this weekend at Circuit of the Americas in Aus-

tin, Texas. A large contingent of the OCESA staff is traveling to COTA to learn the routines of a Cup race weekend.

"This visit is almost like how NASCAR is as a sport — we always tell people that 'Hey, once you go to a race, you're going to fall in love with it,'" said chief operating officer Steve O'Donnell. "That's been my experience in Mexico City and I think you're seeing the same with the drivers who came down here. Seeing them smile, relax, have some fun, learn some new things — I'm hopeful they'll return with some positive messaging."

Elliott, NASCAR's most popular driver and the most reserved of the quartet in Mexico City, said he won't hesitate encouraging fans to come to the race.

"There's been nothing about my experience over the last two days that raises any level of concern of how we're going to be accepted, if there's a lack of excitement, or if there are safety issues," he said. "And the venue? Honestly it was even better than I thought it was going to be. I have nothing bad to say about racing in Mexico City."

Refueled: IndyCar teams excited about TV deal, improved marketing

FROM PAGE 32

Increased TV exposure

Fox Sports acquired IndyCar's broadcast rights last June after the series spent 16 seasons with NBC Sports. Fox promised all 17 races would receive network broadcasts — as well as the two days of qualifying for the Indy 500 — throughout the multiyear deal, the exact length of which has not been disclosed.

Fox Sports has also promised all races will be on Fox and the Fox Sports app, while Fox Deportes will carry Spanish-language coverage. All practice and qualifying sessions will be aired on either FS1 or FS2.

Nineteen races on a network will be an IndyCar record and it is the only top motorsports series in the country with all its races set for that kind of exposure. NASCAR's schedule, for example, is spread across multiple networks in 2025; Fox has said five of its 14 NASCAR races will be on its network, the rest on cable.

"I think what Fox and IndyCar are doing is freaking phenomenal," said McLaren driver Pato O'Ward, who along with Newgarden and Palou are the three featured drivers in Fox Sports' marketing campaign of commercials he called "fun" and "edgy." His commercial aired early during the Super Bowl.

"It's flirting with that line where people do get engaged and you're like, 'Hey, this is different,'" O'Ward added. "It felt like I was doing a movie shoot."

Marketing the racing

The marketing of IndyCar has long been a paddock-wide sore spot for drivers and team owners, who say a lack of series spending is a major factor in slow growth. That is where Eric Shanks, the CEO and executive producer for Fox Sports, can help most.

Shanks is an Indiana native and with that comes an automatic affinity for the Indianapolis 500 and Indianapolis Motor Speedway. He promised that the Indy 500 will be



JOE SKIBINSKI/IndyCar

Alex Palou has dominated IndyCar since moving to Chip Ganassi Racing in 2021. The Spaniard has won three of the past four series championships.

the network's biggest event of the year, a large order considering Fox Sports has the Super Bowl, the Daytona 500 and the World Series.

"In the list of things that we can do to improve IndyCar, number one was finding the right broadcast partner, and to have FOX on board is fantastic. Eric Shanks has a personal commitment to and passion for IndyCar, and I think that will come through in the broadcast quality," McLaren Racing CEO Zak Brown wrote to fans this week. "They're focused on learning about the history and future of IndyCar and what works best, intent on evolving their broadcast through the season. Continuous improvement, I love that."

Changes at the top

This year will be the first full season for IndyCar's new hybrid engine, which was introduced midway through last season. The cost of the transition — along with a new car in development for 2027 — has ruffled ownership.

Tensions over the two projects may have played a role in the dismissal of IndyCar President Jay Frye, who was replaced by speedway President Doug Boles weeks before the season opener. Many believe Frye was fighting hard to help the teams reduce spending, while others grumbled that the installation of Boles has made IndyCar "The Penske Series" since the bulk of the executive leadership team consists of Penske loyalists.

Penske, who turned 88 last week, has tried to maintain a separation from his three-car team and ownership of the series; when Will Power was in the thick of last year's title chase, he stopped discussing IndyCar issues with media. Team Penske also was embroiled in a cheating scandal when it was discovered that Newgarden and Scott McLaughlin illegally used their push-to-pass system in finishing first and third in last year's opener at St. Pete.

What to watch for in 2025

Palou has dominated the series since his

move to Chip Ganassi Racing in 2021. The Spaniard has won 11 races and three of the last four championships, the last two while locked into a \$30 million lawsuit with McLaren over a breach of contract claim. The two sides met for mediation last month with another session set for October.

McLaren has a new lineup as O'Ward has two new teammates in Christian Lundgaard and Nolan Siegel, but most of its title hopes are tied to O'Ward, the wildly popular Mexican driver who is also McLaren's reserve driver in F1. O'Ward was in tears after finishing second to Newgarden in last year's Indy 500, and has made winning that race and the series title his 2025 priorities.

Newgarden is seeking a third consecutive Indy 500 victory, a feat that has never been done. He led a combined 22 laps in his two victories, which is far from the dominance needed to continue the streak.

"We have figured out how to win the race twice so far. I like our process," Newgarden said. "We'll see if it keeps working. If it doesn't, we'll change the formula. But I think we've got a good process."

Power, his Penske teammate, is in a contract year and has hired Fernando Alonso's management group to represent him in negotiations. It is the first time Power, a two-time series champion and Indy 500 winner, has used an agent.

NASCAR star Kyle Larson plans to run in the Indy 500 again, though he has made clear his stock car team and the Coca-Cola 600 that same day are his priority.

All eyes will be on Andretti driver Colton Herta, who is among the candidates for the new Cadillac Formula 1 team that is set to debut in 2026. Herta, who finished second to Palou in last year's standings, believes landing that job will require him to win the Indy 500 and the championship.

And new to the IndyCar grid this year is Prema Racing, an Italian team that competes in F1's lower levels. Prema will debut with Callum Ilott, who has bounced in and out of IndyCar the last four years, and rookie Robert Schwartzman, who won the F2 and F3 titles for Prema.



# COLLEGE BASKETBALL/NFL



Michigan State guard Tre Holloman (5) and teammates celebrate after he made a basket from beyond halfcourt at the buzzer to win the game against Maryland on Wednesday in College Park, Md.

## Holloman's halfcourt heave keeps Spartans atop Big Ten

**BY NOAH TRISTER**  
*Associated Press*

COLLEGE PARK, Md.— Tre Holloman hadn't even reached the "M" logo at midcourt when he jumped off one foot and let the ball fly.

The buzzer sounded as the ball was airborne and somehow it stayed on line before dropping through the hoop with a swish that reverberated across the Big Ten.

If Michigan State and coach Tom Izzo win yet another conference title, Holloman's buzzer-beater might be the reason.

"Every day at home, the night before a game, that last practice, we have the guys go around. Everybody gets a shot at a half-court shot. The last two games, Tre has made two of them. He's made one (before) each game," Izzo said. "I thought that thing was in when it left. I really did."

The Spartans may practice shooting from midcourt, but when Holloman left the ground on this game-winner, he was closer to his own 3-point line — some 65 feet from the hoop. The shot gave No. 8 Michigan State a 58-55 win over No. 16 Maryland, plus a half-game lead over Michigan atop the Big Ten. It was a sensational finish to a game that was high on intensity but low on artistry.

"I felt we deserved to win the game," Izzo said. "I don't think it was a lucky shot at the end. I

thought we played inspired basketball."

If the game had gone to overtime, Holloman would have been largely to blame. With the Spartans up by two, his pass in the backcourt was intercepted, and then he quickly fouled Ja'Kobi Gillespie, whose two free throws with 42.1 seconds left tied it at 55. Then Jaxon Kohler missed for Michigan State, giving the Terrapins a chance to win with the shot clock off.

Gillespie missed a 3-pointer, and there was just enough time for Kohler to rebound and flip the ball to Holloman, who was 2-for-11 from the field at that point.

"Holloman hadn't made a shot all night, so once he released it, I knew the thing was going in," Maryland coach Kevin Willard said.

Willard wasn't too hard on Gillespie after his missed 3 left Michigan State time for a final heave.


"Maybe if he waits, he doesn't get an open look. I trust Kobi. He's been great all year," Willard said. "At the end of the day, the kid still had to hit a 60-footer to beat you. So, yes, do you want him to take the last shot? Absolutely. But it's not like he took it at six seconds and Holloman was able to dribble up and get a layup."

For Holloman, it was a chance to prove that shooting from midcourt isn't just a way to goof around at practice.

"I knew that it was good," Holloman said.



No. 1 Auburn (26-2) at  
No. 17 Kentucky (19-9)  
AFN-Sports2  
Saturday 7 p.m. CET  
Sunday 3a.m. JKT



No. 10 Texas Tech (21-7)  
at Kansas (19-9)  
AFN-Sports  
Saturday 8 p.m. CET  
Sunday 4 a.m. JKT



No. 6 Alabama (23-5) at  
No. 5 Tennessee (23-5)  
AFN-Sports  
Saturday 10 p.m. CET  
Sunday 6 a.m. JKT

man said. "We practice those." And when it did go in?  
"I just remember zeroes, and that we up."

## League to review regular season OT, measuring system

**By ROB MAADDI**  
*Associated Press*

INDIANAPOLIS — The NFL is considering changing overtime rules in the regular season to decrease the advantage for teams that win the coin toss.

"It's time to rethink the overtime rule," league executive Troy Vincent said Wednesday at the NFL scouting combine.

Vincent said the competition committee agrees overtime rules need to be addressed. Receiving the ball first has become more of an advantage than before 2011, when overtime was sudden death. Receiving teams won 56.8% of overtime games from 2017-24, up from 55.4% from 2001-11.

Both teams currently get an opportunity to possess the ball in overtime unless a touchdown is scored on the first possession.

The rules are different in the playoffs. Both teams get a chance to have a possession even if the offense scores a touchdown on the opening drive. That postseason change came after Buffalo's loss to Kansas City in a divisional-round game in January 2022.

Making the overtime rules the same in the regular season is a possible solution, along with extending the period to 15 minutes.

Among other changes, the NFL plans to use its virtual measuring system to determine first downs in 2025. This wouldn't eliminate the officials who manually spot the ball and use chains to mark the line to gain. The optimal tracking system notifies officiating instantly if a first down was gained after the ball is spotted by hand.

"We used this in the background last season," said Kimberly Fields, the NFL's senior vice president of football operations. "The goal for 2025 is to continue to train our techs, who are the ones who will be utilizing the technology, finalizing all of our officiating processes and procedures around virtual measurements and testing the graphi-

cs for the broadcast and in-stadium, so fans in the stadium and fans watching on television can see what we're doing. The chain crew will still be there as backup."

Also, the competition committee will review expansion of the replay assist to include more fouls, but Vincent said "there was no appetite" from the committee to use video replay to throw a flag.

A team could still propose a rule change to do that. For now, if officials miss an obvious penalty such as a facemask, replay assist can't throw a flag.

Replay assist was used in 2024 to pick up flags thrown for roughing the passer (contact with head/neck), unnecessary roughness (runner out of bounds), intentional grounding and ineligible player downfield.

Expansion under consideration for 2025 would include roughing the passer (hit below the knee), unnecessary roughness (defenseless receiver/player), facemask (contact of hand with facemask), tripping, illegal crackback block and horse-collar tackle, among others.

Vincent said the league wants to find a way to bring back onside kicks while also installing a permanent kickoff rule after a one-year trial with what's called the dynamic kickoff.

The trial made kickoffs more exciting with higher rate of returns. Vincent said he anticipates the spot of the touchback on kickoffs being moved from the 30- to the 35-yard line.

But the changes impacted the onside kick. Teams were 3-for-50, the lowest recovery rate since 2001.

"Universal consensus that we know we need to do something with this play," Vincent said.

He added there wasn't much conversation around a fourth-and-long option to keep possession, though those discussions could occur next month.



Ravens linebacker Odafe Oweh grabs the facemask of Bengals tight end Tanner Hudson, a penalty that will not be called by replay assist.



## NFL COMBINE



BARRY REEGER/AP

**Penn State defensive end Abdul Carter celebrates a tackle against UCLA last season. Carter is one of the top NFL Draft prospects.**

# Penn St. DE Carter says he's best player in draft

By MICHAEL MAROT  
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Former Penn State star Abdul Carter made one thing clear Wednesday: He should be the No. 1 overall pick in this year's NFL draft.

Carter was in the first group of players to speak with reporters at the NFL's annual scouting combine in Indianapolis, and he wasted no time declaring himself the top player in the 2025 draft class.

"I feel like I'm the best player in the country and the best player should be picked first," he said. "It's the work I put in with my dad, who trained me, and all the sacrifices I made, I know I'm the best."

Of course, such pronouncements have come to be expected during combine week.

Still, Carter certainly has a case after finishing last season with 68 tackles, a Football Bowl Subdivision-leading 23½ tackles for loss and 12 sacks.

He was the Big Ten's top defen-

sive player in 2024 and finished his three-year career with 39½ tackles for loss, 23 sacks and 14 passes defended.

The question is whether the 6-foot-3, 259-pound Carter is a better fit at defensive end or outside linebacker. Either way, he's likely to be the first or second defensive player selected on April 24.

ESPN reported Wednesday that tests revealed Carter has a stress reaction in his right foot.

"There are mixed opinions on whether he needs surgery, and we will figure that out in the near future," agent Drew Rosenhaus told ESPN, adding he still believes Carter will be the top pick.

Regardless, going No. 1 overall remains a challenge.

Since 2007 only three defensive players have been chosen No. 1 overall — Jadeveon Clowney in 2014, Myles Garrett in 2017 and Travon Walker in 2022. Each was chosen primarily because of their pass-rushing ability.

And leapfrogging the top two quarterbacks, Cam Ward of Miami and Shedeur Sanders of Colorado, or Heisman Trophy winner Travis Hunter will be difficult.

"I think quarterbacks have kind of a lock on that or maybe a great pass rusher," Cincinnati Bengals director of player personnel Duke Tobin said Tuesday when asked about a non-quarterback being the top overall selection. "Or maybe a guy that plays six positions like the one from my alma mater. We'll see."

Tobin, who attended Colorado, was referring to Hunter, who is listed as a cornerback but hopes to also play receiver.

Yet Carter believes he can defy the odds.

"Defensive players impact the game just as much as the quarterback," the 21-year-old Carter said. "All the teams that have won Super Bowls, they have that one standout player. I feel like I'm that."

## 'Friendly competitiveness' among college DL tandems

By MICHAEL MAROT  
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Mason Graham and Kenneth Grant spent three seasons trading jabs, challenging one another for the title of best Michigan defensive tackle.

The competition propelled both into All-Americans and top NFL draft prospects.

And now that they've made it to Indianapolis, among the 329 invitees to the league's annual scouting combine, their friendly rivalry has been put on hold.

They have bigger dreams to chase these days.

"We always talk smack and challenge each other," Grant said Wednesday, the first day players at the major offseason event spoke with reporters. "But we have different games. I tried to learn from him, he tried learning from me, so it's a friendly competitiveness."

Graham and Grant could both be high draft picks, maybe even the first players at their position called during April's NFL draft. Should things fall right after teaming up to bring the Wolverines the 2023 national championship, this duo could be part of another major feat — the first Michigan draft class with four first-round picks.

Perhaps that's why they've ditched the playful banter this week.

But Graham and Grant aren't the only friendly rivals roaming the hallways in Indianapolis — not by a long shot.

Ohio State defensive ends JT Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer, have become draft workout partners in California, and are rooming together once again this time as national champs.

Texas A&M defensive end Nic Scourton,



LINDSEY WASSON/AP

**Michigan defensive linemen Kenneth Grant, left, and Mason Graham learned from each other for three seasons. Both could be high NFL draft picks this year.**

who played previously at Purdue, is helping another Aggies defensive end, Shemar Stewart, navigate the city. Notre Dame defensive tackles Howard Cross III and Rylie Mills are hanging out together, giving the combine an unusually high mix of tag-team college defensive line tandems.

"It's funny," said Sawyer, who also roomed with Tuimoloau at Ohio State. "We got told our roommates here could be random. I checked in first. The bags didn't have names on 'em, so I had no idea who it was. Here comes JT walking down the hallway, so we started laughing. It's good to be rooming with him again. It's been fun."

But this week is about getting down to business.

The defensive linemen and linebackers have spent the past couple of nights doing interviews with teams and will conduct on-field workouts Thursday. While most fans want to see how former Penn State star Abdul Carter, the top-rated edge rusher, or former Georgia linebacker Jalon Walker perform, the college teammates will compete against one another for draft position.

Some consider Stewart and Scourton, for instance, the top two defensive ends after Carter. Scourton had 15 sacks over the past two seasons while Stewart was on the opposite side. They were a perfect pairing, learning how to feed off one another.

"He brought the competitive energy every day and I wanted to go out there every

day at practice. That's kind of how our dynamic was," Scourton said. "It's amazing to be here with him. It's a great experience to come out here with my guys and be able to live out our dreams."

The dreams of Cross and Mills have taken a somewhat different turn since finishing as the national runner-up with the Fighting Irish this past season.

Cross, whose father was a Super Bowl-winning tight end with the New York Giants, opened the 2024 season as a second-team preseason All-American. But he missed six weeks with a sprained left ankle, returning for the school's playoff run — only to see Mills suffer a season-ending torn anterior cruciate ligament in Notre Dame's first-round victory over Indiana.

So as Cross tries to rebuild his draft stock at the combine, Mills is relying on his game tape to convince scouts what he's capable of doing when healthy.

"My leg is strong, I'm walking around, I'm just lucky to be in this position. The good part is I can kind of go back and show them the player I was," Mills said. "Look, I know I'm rehabbing right now, but if you just look at the level of play you're going to get, it's going to be fresh legs."

Cross is rooting for him.

And so are the other teammates, who have used their personal competitions to put them on the brink of a pro career and find themselves both working hard and cheering for one another.

"Every day in practice, we were just trying to one up each other, who can do the best stuff, who has more passion. It was a friendly competition," Graham said, referring to Grant. "Honestly, we like competing against each other because we feel like we're two of the best."



# SPORTS



## Making multiple moves

Athletics, in Sacramento with better roster, could be playoff contenders » **MLB, Page 28**



Josef Newgarden, front, celebrates after winning the Indy 500 on May 26 at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. It was his second consecutive victory in the race.

AP

# Refueled optimism

Palou, Pato, Newgarden and Fox: IndyCar starts season with big stars, big hopes and new TV partner

BY JENNA FRYER  
Associated Press

**F**ox Sports marked its new oversight of the IndyCar Series with glossy new commercials that have been showcased everywhere from the Super Bowl to the Daytona 500.

The network partnership begins in earnest this weekend with the season-opening

race on the streets of downtown St. Petersburg, Fla. There is hope that Fox Sports will push IndyCar back toward the top of motorsports.

How Fox might be able to boost the Roger Penske-owned series has been an overwhelming theme of the offseason, overshadowing Alex Palou's bid for a third consecutive IndyCar championship, Josef

Newgarden's quest for a third consecutive win in the Indianapolis 500, a change at the top of series, a new team and a revolving cast of drivers.

"I love what Fox has done with the series and it does feel like there's a different level of excitement — it is the best racing across many of the series and that's the story that needs to be told," said Dan Towriss, the new

majority owner of Andretti Global. "Fox has done their part in that and brought in a lot of momentum. It's probably premature to say 'IndyCar is back' but I'm really hoping IndyCar is back and really catches the wave of motorsports excitement that's developing in the U.S."

**SEE REFUELED ON PAGE 29**

2-pointers still in decline; debate over value continues » **NBA, Page 26**