

# STARS AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## Lasers get test in ‘contested environment’

*The Washington Post*

The U.S. Air Force announced Friday it soon will deploy two ground-based laser weapons to an undisclosed location to test how they can be used against small drones, the service’s first “operational field test” of an experimental “directed energy” weapon.

On Friday afternoon the Air Force announced a \$23 million sole-source contract for two of Raytheon’s High Energy Laser Weapons Systems, through which the systems are to be tested for 12 months in an undisclosed “contested environment” outside the continen-

tal United States.

“What we really want to do is figure out how we can deploy these systems in an environment where our warfighters work and train every day,” said Evan Hunt, director of high energy laser and counter-UAS at Raytheon.

The 10-kilowatt lasers are to be mounted on small ground-based vehicles and aimed using an interface similar to a video game controller. The prototype laser weapons were built by Raytheon and incorporate a range of components from the commercial technology industry, including high-perfor-

mance lithium-ion batteries, the same type used in electric vehicles.

Because laser weapons could fire constantly without wasting ammunition, military technology experts have theorized they could one day be useful in combatting the small, remotely operated quadcopter drones that ISIS has used. They are also expected to be an effective counter against swarming attack drones, a concept that a handful of countries are exploring.

“The fact that it’s a laser weapon allows you to put energy in a target at the speed of

light. It can be an instantaneous heating event,” said Michael Jirjis, who leads the Air Force’s directed energy experimentation projects.

Jirjis later said in an email that the test will be the first “operational field assessment” of a laser weapon.

He said the effort is the first U.S. Air Force deployment “for an operational field assessment of lasers for counter UAS and the first time we have the entire AF Enterprise intimately engaged across the acquisition community, test centers, operators, and headquarters.”

## Navy drops team motto deemed ‘insensitive’

*The Capital (Annapolis, Md.)*

The Naval Academy superintendent announced Friday that “Load the Clip” has been dropped as this year’s football team motto, calling it “insensitive” to those affected by the mass shooting in Annapolis, Md., last year.

Chosen by senior captain football players for the 2019-2020 season, the motto was changed after reporters from the Capital Gazette asked Navy officials about it in the context of a national wave of mass shootings and the attack that killed five people just a few miles from Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium. On June 28, 2018, a man with a shotgun entered the Capital Gazette newsroom and killed five employees: Gerald Fischman, John McNamara, Rob Hiaasen, Wendi Winters and Rebecca Smith. That same year, in September, three people were killed and three wounded at an Aberdeen Rite-Aid — about 60 miles from An-

napolis — before the gunman killed herself.

“It is always my priority, part of my mission statement, for the Navy to be a good neighbor,” Naval Academy Superintendent Vice Admiral Sean S. Buck said in a statement released Friday afternoon.

“The bottom line is, we missed the mark here. The initial internal football team motto selected, ‘Load the Clip,’ was inappropriate and insensitive to the community we call home, and for that, I take responsibility for and apologize to not only the Capital Gazette but the entire Annapolis community.”

The new motto will be “Win the Day.”

The motto was first reported Thursday afternoon by the Capital Gazette.

It’s been tradition the past several years for team captains to select the motto, an internal slogan used by the players to motivate themselves. Last year’s was “For the Culture,”

and in 2016 it was “We Will,” in honor of Will McKamey, who died three days after losing consciousness during a spring practice.

The phrase “Load the Clip” was intended to be a metaphor for daily game day preparation, said Cmdr. Alana Garas, Naval Academy spokeswoman.

In an interview Thursday with The Capital, Navy head coach Ken Niumatalolo said he was “leery” of the slogan but also understood the players’ relationship with firearms as members of the military.

“Clearly it’s a metaphor that speaks to the fact we’re going to battle every weekend and when you go to battle you need to have enough ammunition,” Niumatalolo said. “It means you have to be prepared for the fight and that is a process that happens every day.”

Upon learning the motto may be insensitive, the team captains met and proposed the new motto “Win the Day.”

“Our coaches and midshipmen realized that the direction they were headed created sensitivities that were not aligned with the original intent,” Naval Academy Director of Athletics Chet Gladchuk said in a statement.

“Corrective measures were taken immediately and on behalf of the team at large, our sincerest apologies to anyone who was offended. It was a lesson learned and it’s important that everything we do at the Naval Academy represents not only appropriate action, but assumed responsibility. We are hopeful we can now put this behind us and ‘Win the Day.’”

The change comes one day before Saturday’s annual Navy Football Fan Fest and Media Day at the stadium.

Navy players will sign autographs from 10 to 11 a.m., before meeting fans on the field and taking photos until noon.

# Navy lieutenant killed in fighter jet crash

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A Navy lieutenant was killed Wednesday when the F/A-18E Super Hornet fighter jet that he was piloting through a Death Valley canyon crashed into a ravine wall at high speed, Navy officials said Friday.

The service identified the pilot as Lt. Charles Z. Walker, 33, from Strike Fighter Squadron 151, also known as the Vigilantes, which is based at Naval Air Station Lemoore in California. Walker was described as an “incredible naval aviator,” a son and a husband by the commander of Strike Fighter Wing Pacific, Navy Capt. James

Bates.

“He was an integral member of the Vigilante family and his absence will be keenly felt on this flight line,” Bates said in a statement released Friday afternoon. “Our aviators understand the risk associated with this profession, and they knowingly accept it in service to our nation. The untimely loss of a fellow aviator and shipmate pains us all. Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family and friends.”

Walker was commissioned a Naval officer in December 2008 through the Navy ROTC program at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University in Florida, and he completed flight school in September 2009, according

to his service records.

He joined Strike Fighter Squadron 151 in February 2018. He previously served tours with Strike Fighter Squadron 122 at NAS Lemoore, at the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center in Nevada and with Strike Fighter Squadron 195 in Iwakuni, Japan, where he was stationed from 2012 to 2015, his records show.

The Navy declared Walker dead Thursday, more than 24 hours after his Super Hornet crashed during a routine training flight through a section of Death Valley National Park known as Star Wars Canyon. The ravine is a popular spot for tourists and photographers to watch U.S. military jets speed

through the gorge, which takes its nickname from its colorful rock walls reminiscent of Star Wars hero Luke Skywalker’s native planet of Tatooine.

The service initially launched a search-and-rescue effort following the crash, but it was called off after an initial investigation determined Walker did not escape the jet before impact.

The National Park Service said seven bystanders suffered minor injuries from shrapnel after the impact.

Navy officials said Friday that an investigation into the mishap was ongoing and they had yet to determine what caused the crash, the first reported F/A-18 wreck in 2019.

## Former Green Berets sentenced for embezzling

*The Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer*

Three former U.S. Army Special Forces members have been sentenced for embezzling funds while deployed as a team in Afghanistan, a report given to Congress stated Tuesday.

Court records show a fourth soldier was sentenced at a separate date from the three referenced in the report, and a fifth soldier is disputing the charge.

The soldiers were accused of taking funds from the Commander’s Emergency Response Program, stated the report given to Congress by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

Chief Warrant Officer Deric Harper, Sgt. 1st Class Jeffrey Arthur Cook and Sgt. 1st Class Barry Lee Walls Jr. — all former members of the 3rd Special Forces Group — were sentenced June 11 by the Eastern District of North Carolina for their involvement in a money-theft scheme while deployed as a team in Afghanistan, the report states.

All three were ordered to serve three years’ probation,

forfeit \$40,000, and pay \$40,000 in criminal restitution.

Sgt. 1st Class Cleo Brian Autry was sentenced July 9 to three years’ probation and to pay \$40,000 in restitution fees after pleading guilty to charges of conspiracy and theft of government property, court records state.

A spokesman for the 3rd Special Forces Group said all of the soldiers have been discharged or retired from the military.

Court records state that the five soldiers were deployed to Afghanistan between July 2009 and January 2010.

Court records state that the soldiers withdrew federal funds in the form of Afghan currency from the finance office at Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan, took Afghan currency from a forward operating base near Jalalabad and converted the monies into American currency to purchase money orders and either mailed money orders and currency back to the U.S. or transported the money orders and stolen funds back to the U.S.

## Pentagon to reexamine cloud contract process

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — The White House has instructed newly installed Defense Secretary Mark Esper to reexamine the awarding of the military’s massive cloud-computing contract because of concerns that the deal would go to Amazon, officials close to the decision-making process said.

The 11th-hour Oval Office intervention comes just weeks before the winning bid was expected to be announced and has now left a major military priority up in the air, said the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door process freely. As recently as last Sunday, the Defense Department defended its plans to move ahead with a single company for what is known as the Joint Enterprise Defense Infrastructure, or JEDI, a \$10 billion contract that would be one of the government’s most expensive information technology procurements ever.

No decision has yet been made, the officials said. But some officials said the move to award the contract to more than one company is a possibility.

The president’s directive represents a departure from what is usually a scripted bureaucratic process. President Donald Trump on several occasions has spoken out against Amazon and its Chief Executive Jeff Bezos. And he has attacked the Bezos-owned Washington Post for its coverage of him by conflating it with Amazon’s interests.

Amazon did not return a request for comment.

Esper pledged to take a “hard look” at the issue and did not set a timetable for his decision.

Giving the contract to more than one company would be welcomed by Oracle and IBM, whose business is threatened by Amazon. They have unsuccessfully sued to block the award. The Pentagon has said that only Amazon and Microsoft meet the minimum requirements for JEDI.

# US to test new missile as treaty ends

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With the scrapping of a landmark arms control agreement Friday, the U.S. announced plans to test a new missile amid growing concerns about emerging threats and new weapons.

U.S. officials said they are no longer hamstrung and could now develop weapons systems previously banned under the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia, a Cold War-era agreement that both sides repeatedly accused the other of violating. The treaty was also criticized because it did not cover China or missile technology that did not exist a generation ago.

The end of the treaty comes amid rising doubts about whether the two countries will extend an agreement on long-range

nuclear weapons scheduled to expire in 2021. President Donald Trump said he has been discussing a new agreement to reduce nuclear weapons with China and Russia.

“And I will tell you, China was very, very excited about talking about it and so was Russia,” Trump told reporters. “So I think we’ll have a deal at some point.”

The Trump administration, which gave its six-month notice on Feb. 2 of its pending withdrawal from the INF, had repeatedly said Russia was violating its provisions, an accusation President Barack Obama made as well.

“The United States will not remain party to a treaty that is deliberately violated by Russia,” Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in announcing the

formal withdrawal, calling a Russian missile system prohibited under the agreement a “direct threat to the United States and our allies.”

The end of the INF, which comes as world powers seek to contain the nuclear threat from Iran and North Korea, is another milestone in the deterioration of relations between the U.S. and Russia.

“The denunciation of the INF treaty confirms that the U.S. has embarked on destroying all international agreements that do not suit them for one reason or another,” the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement. “This leads to the actual dismantling of the existing arms control system.”

A senior administration official downplayed the upcoming U.S. weapons test, saying it

was not meant to be a provocation. The official, who was not authorized to publicly discuss the test flight, said the U.S. is “years away” from effectively deploying weapons previously banned under the agreement.

But the U.S. might eventually want to base such weapons in Europe as a counterbalance to Russia, or in Asia to counter China.

The central issue with the INF was that both Russia and the U.S. had long accused the other of cheating on the treaty, which banned land-based missiles of ranges between 310 and 3,410 miles.

The U.S. said the noncompliant missile systems the Russians fielded gave Moscow an advantage over NATO forces in Europe.

## UN: Afghan civilian casualties spike in July

BY PHILLIP WALTER  
WELLMAN

Stripes and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The war in Afghanistan killed and wounded more civilians in July than in any other month since May 2017, the United Nations said Saturday.

More than 1,500 civilian casualties were documented last month as peace efforts to end the U.S.’ longest war continued, the U.N. said in a statement.

The preliminary figures were released just days after the U.N. announced that the number of noncombatants killed and injured in the conflict had dropped by over a quarter during the first half of this year compared to the same period last year.

Anti-government groups like the Taliban were mostly to blame for the rise of civilian casualties in July, the U.N. said, adding that homemade-bomb attacks caused more than half of the civilian casualties recorded

during the month.

The findings were released as U.S. and Taliban officials in Doha prepared to hold their latest round of direct talks aimed at ending the 17-year war.

The U.S. in recent months has increased military pressure in support of a negotiated settlement with the Taliban, but in doing so, it has contributed to a record number of Afghan civilians killed by airstrikes, according to U.N. data, which the U.S. military disputes.

Noncombatant casualties caused by American and other pro-government forces remained at “concerning levels,” the U.N. said Saturday.

Disproportionate Taliban attacks on military and security targets in urban areas caused great harm to civilians in July, the U.N. said.

One such attack, on an Afghan army logistics center in Kabul on July 1, killed seven civilians and injured over 140 others, officials said.

## Intelligence director nominee withdraws

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump’s pick for national intelligence director, Texas Rep. John Ratcliffe, withdrew from consideration Friday after just five days as he faced growing questions about his experience and qualifications.

The move underscored the uncertainty over his confirmation prospects. Democrats openly dismissed the Republican congressman as an unqualified partisan, and Republicans offered only lukewarm and tentative expressions of support.

The announcement leaves the intelligence community without a permanent, Senate-confirmed leader at a time when the U.S. government is grappling with North Korea’s nuclear ambitions, the prospect of war with Iran and the anticipated efforts of Russia or other foreign governments to interfere in the American political system.

In a tweet Friday, Trump said Ratcliffe had decided to stay in Congress so as to avoid “months of slander and libel.”

Trump didn’t cite specific media reports, though multiple stories in the last week have questioned Ratcliffe’s qualifications and suggested that he had misrepresented his experience as a federal prosecutor in Texas.

Ratcliffe is a frequent Trump defender who fiercely questioned former special counsel Robert Mueller during the House Judiciary Committee hearing.

Even as Mueller laid bare concerns that Russia was working to interfere with U.S. elections again, Ratcliffe remained focused on the possibility that U.S. intelligence agencies had overly relied on unverified opposition research in investigating the Trump campaign’s ties to Russia.

# New Puerto Rican governor sworn in

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Puerto Rico Gov. Ricardo Rossello resigned Friday as promised, clearing the way for veteran politician Pedro Pierluisi to be sworn in as his replacement, a move that threw the U.S. territory into a period of fresh political uncertainty.

Rossello had promised to step down in response to weeks of popular protest over mismanagement and a series of leaked chats in which he and advisers denigrated a range of Puerto Ricans. Because of problems with the qualifications of members of Rossello's administration in the constitutional line of

succession, it was unclear until the last minute who would become governor.

Pierluisi was named secretary of state, the next in line to be governor, in a recess appointment this week. In an emailed announcement from his office, Rossello said Pierluisi would succeed him. He was sworn in by a judge at 5 p.m., the hour Rossello had set to leave office.

Four hours later, San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulin Cruz tweeted that the municipality at 8 a.m. on Monday would be challenging Pierluisi's swearing in as governor. Meanwhile, a well-respected attorneys' or-

ganization accused Pierluisi of "hijacking" the constitution.

The territory's House of Representatives confirmed Pierluisi as secretary of state Friday, but the Senate has not yet voted on his appointment. Rossello said confirmation by both houses was unnecessary for a recess appointment, an assertion that appeared certain to generate legal challenges.

After taking the oath at his sister's house, Pierluisi emerged at the governor's residence to address the press and promised only to serve as governor until the Senate's hearing on his nomination, which has been moved up to Monday.

If the Senate votes no, Pierluisi said, he will step down and hand the governorship to the justice secretary, the next in line under the constitution.

Nothing more was heard from Rossello.

Pierluisi said he was "fully capable and authorized to act, but the Senate will have its say."

Depending on the Senate's action, his tenure "could be very short-lived," he said. He did not plan to move into the governor's mansion until after the vote. He also said he would avoid any major changes and concentrate on meeting with top government officials.

## Town halls could sway Dems' impeachment steps

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Freshman Democratic Rep. Andy Kim came face to face with impeachment fervor at a town hall in New Jersey. "Do your job!" shouted one voter.

Several states away, a woman held up a copy of special counsel Robert Mueller's report and told freshman Rep. Elissa Slotkin at a Michigan town hall she hoped she would "be the person that puts us over the top to start an impeachment inquiry."

And in semirural Virginia, newcomer Rep. Abigail Spanberger encountered voters with questions, if not resolve, about impeaching President Donald Trump.

"I don't have blood dripping from my fangs for or against impeachment," said David Susan, 70, a retired U.S. Postal inspector who favors starting an inquiry. "I just want the truth to come out."

It's these freshman lawmakers, and others like them, who will likely decide when, if ever, House Democrats start formal efforts to impeach the president.

Neither Kim nor Slotkin nor Spanberger supports impeachment. But with half the House Democrats now in favor of beginning an inquiry, the pressure will only mount on the holdouts to reach a tipping point. And with lawmakers returning home to voters during the August recess, what happens next may prove pivotal.

The pro-impeachment group Need to Impeach is running television ads and fanning out to congressional districts to push lawmakers, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, to move more swiftly toward impeachment proceedings.

The organization's lead strategist, Kevin Mack, says his counsel to lawmakers, especially those new freshmen who took over formerly Republican-held seats, is to ignore the campaign consultants and party strategists and "do what you think is right" about Trump.

"You can't really make the argument he's the most corrupt president in American history and not hold him accountable," he said. "Either you think what he's doing is OK or you hold him accountable."

## Man upset mom's body sold to military for 'blast testing'

The New York Daily News

NEW YORK — An Arizona man recently learned that his mom's body was sold to the military for "blast testing" after he donated it in hopes that it could be used for science.

Doris Stauffer was 73 years old when she died in hospice care more than five years ago.

She had suffered from Alzheimer's during the last years of her life, but doctors said she didn't carry the gene for it. They worried the disease may have mutated and hoped to study her brain to find out more after she died.

When Stauffer died, her neurologist couldn't accept the body, so her son, Jim Stauffer, reached out to other donation facilities hoping they could use her body for research.

The Biological Resource Center in Phoenix picked up Doris Stauffer's body within 45 minutes of her death, and her son signed paperwork that specified what could and could not be done with the body.

That center, the same one that recently made headlines for being a "human chop shop," was raided by the FBI in 2014. Horrifying details about the

discoveries made at the center came to light recently after an agent described what they saw as part of a civil lawsuit against the business' owner, Stephen Gore.

Former FBI special agent Mark Cwynar described seeing a "cooler filled with male genitalia" and a "large torso with the head removed and replaced with a smaller head sewn together in a 'Frankenstein manner.'"

A few days after Stauffer signed the papers, he received a wooden box with what he was told were the majority of his mother's ashes. He didn't learn the truth until a Reuters reporter contacted him a couple years ago with documents showing what really happened to his mother's body. It was one of many sold to the U.S. Army for blast testing.

"She was then supposedly strapped in a chair on some sort of apparatus, and a detonation took place underneath her to basically kind of get an idea of what the human body goes through when a vehicle is hit by an IED," Stauffer told KNXV.

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Twins going to festival stopped for 2nd time

**OH** TWINSBURG — Twin brothers driving separately to the Twins Days Festival said each got pulled over for the second time in two years.

But this time, they got off without a ticket and just a laugh.

Andy Baker said he and his twin brother, Chad, were driving from Nashville, Tenn., to Twinsburg in northeastern Ohio when they were stopped. He said they were pulled over because the trooper thought the identical twins had identical license plates. But there's a slight difference because one plate has a zero, while the other has the letter O.

## Theatre replaces play over content, cost

**AK** JUNEAU — An Alaska theater removed a book-inspired play from its scheduled annual productions after concerns were raised about its content and cost, a report said.

Perseverance Theatre removed "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" in July because of its depiction of topics in indigenous culture and sexual assault and the theater's financial limitations, the Juneau Empire reported.

"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" is told through the eyes of a Native American character written by a white man, and its main character is a convicted rapist, Perseverance Theatre art director Leslie Ishii said.

## 'Trump 2020' banner gets fans booted

**MD** BALTIMORE — Four fans who unfurled a banner in a baseball

stadium supporting President Donald Trump's reelection were escorted out of a Baltimore Orioles game by police and stadium officials.

A photo taken by a Baltimore Sun reporter at the game shows the fans hanging the red, white and blue banner with the words "Keep America Great!" and "Trump 2020" during the eighth inning at Oriole Park at Camden Yards.

Camden Yards' policy says no banners can be hung in the stadium to keep from obstructing views, and that banners can be confiscated if their message is commercial, political or "in bad taste."

## Man freed as photos discredit witness

**AL** TUSCALOOSA — Authorities dropped capital murder charges against an Alabama man after cellphone photos discredited the planned testimony of a prosecution witness.

The Tuscaloosa News reported that the two photos helped free Shadrell Matthews from custody four days before his trial.

Matthews was accused of helping kill a 62-year-old man in June 2013.

Two witnesses planned to testify that they saw a deep knife wound on Matthews in the days after the slaying, suggesting he may have been wounded during the crime. But defense attorneys found photos taken by the witnesses during that time showing Matthews without the reported wounds.

## \$450 cookie buyer wanted lawyer dead

**SC** SPARTANBURG — A South Carolina man praised on social media for spending \$450 to buy Girl

Scouts cookies has pleaded guilty to plotting to kill a prosecutor and witnesses in his drug case.

Federal prosecutors said Detric McGowan, 46, offered his cellmate \$10,000 to arrange the killing. He pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice and drug charges involving cocaine, heroin and fentanyl.

Prosecutors said McGowan was indicted in February, around the same time a Greenville mother posted McGowan's picture on Facebook, saying he bought all her Girl Scouts cookies so they could get out of the cold.

## Law enforcers learn they are half-brothers

**FL** BOYNTON BEACH — The apple doesn't fall far from the tree for two Florida law enforcement officers who discovered they were half brothers through a DNA test.

The Boynton Beach Police Department posted on Facebook that Officer Eric Reynolds recently was contacted by a deputy from Orlando who said a DNA test had revealed they are half brothers.

Reynolds met Orange County Sheriff's Sgt. David Stull for the first time last month. Stull was adopted as an infant and said he knew very little about his family history until he took the test.

## Permit issue dooms Three Rivers Regatta

**PA** PITTSBURGH — The EQT Three Rivers Regatta, a western Pennsylvania tradition for more than four decades in Pittsburgh, was canceled days before its scheduled opening.

Attorney Charles Scholz told reporters that regatta promoter LionHeart Event Group hadn't

secured proper permits or paid vendors, including the state for use of Point State Park and police. Scholz said the regatta board had no choice but to withdraw its permit application. Officials said investigations had begun and legal remedies would be pursued with an eye to bringing the regatta back next year.

## Illegal Pete's may use its sketchy name

**DE** DOVER — Colorado-based restaurant chain Illegal Pete's won a court fight with Delaware officials over their refusal to accept its conversion to a Delaware limited liability company because the company's name has "a negative connotation."

Attorneys for the Division of Corporations indicated in a recent court filing that the agency had reversed course and filed the restaurant company's certificates of conversion and formation to become a Delaware LLC.

As a result, Illegal Pete's LLC was registered in Delaware on July 8.

## Arrest made after man hit while mowing

**NH** DERRY — Police made an arrest in connection with a hit-and-run that seriously injured a New Hampshire man while he was mowing his lawn.

Navy veteran John Pothier, of Derry, suffered serious leg and arm injuries when he was hit in June.

WMUR-TV reported Thomas Marzola, 57, of Londonderry, turned himself in after learning that a warrant was issued. He's been charged with felony conduct after an accident and insurance fraud.

From wire reports

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and Military News

## Commentary

# Georgia has to beat Tide to be top dog

Associated Press

ATHENS, Ga. — If you're looking for a terser-than-usual response from Kirby Smart, just bring up how the last two seasons ended.

The Georgia coach will shoot you a steely eyed glare that falls somewhere between disgust and disdain, then respond with a banal cliché that makes it clear you're just wasting everyone's time even broaching the subject.

"We are looking forward," Smart said Friday, when that all-too-familiar question was raised again as the Bulldogs began practicing for another season of lofty expectations. "We are excited about this year."

No doubt, Georgia has plenty of reasons to be excited.

In just three short seasons, Smart has molded the Bulldogs into one of the nation's elite college football programs, turning his dynamic recruiting touch into a seat at the table alongside the handful of schools that can be counted on to annually contend for a national title.

But there's still one big roadblock standing in the way.

That albatross to the west. Nick Saban's Alabama Crimson Tide.

The teams met two years ago in the national championships game. Last year, they clashed with the Southeastern Conference title and a trip to the College Football Playoff on the line.

Both times, Georgia had a program-defining victory in its grasp.

Both times, Alabama managed to wiggle away.

As much as Smart and his thoroughly indoctrinated players prefer to avoid the subject — and, yes, their answers Friday fell right in line with their coach's — this is a mountain that must be conquered before the Dawgs can climb on toward the biggest prize of all.

As long as Alabama sits atop the SEC, Georgia can't be the top dog anywhere.

"We've got to finish better, first and foremost," said D'Andre Swift, a dynamic running back who figures to get plenty of attention as a possible Heisman Trophy candidate. "It's the little things — focusing on special teams more, stuff

like that. It's the little things we can always do better at."

While it's too soon to call this the Saban Curse, it's on the verge of festering into more than a minor wound for those between the hedges.

"The past is the past," said quarterback Jake Fromm, doing a spot-on impression of his head coach, who worked for Saban before taking over at Georgia. "We're focused on the future. Today is about the first day of camp and how we can succeed at that."

Georgia actually won the SEC title in 2017 and made it all the way to the national title game, only to find Alabama standing in the way. Even more galling: The Tide didn't even win their own division that year, knocked out by a loss to Auburn in the regular-season finale but still good enough to receive an invite to the four-team national playoff.

Of course, we all know what happened next.

The Bulldogs built a 13-0 halftime lead over Alabama in the title game, prompting Saban to switch quarterbacks from Jalen Hurts to Tua Tago-

vailoa, who sparked a comeback that sent the game to overtime. Georgia went back ahead with a field goal, and then sacked Tagovailoa to set up second-and-26. The freshman responded with a 41-yard pass to DeVonta Smith, who broke free behind a botched coverage to haul in the championship-clinching touchdown.

Last December, the teams met again in the SEC title game with a spot in the College Football Playoff on the line.

Again, it was Georgia grabbing the lead. Again, it was Alabama making a quarterback switch, this time turning to Hurts after Tagovailoa was injured. In the end, it was another excruciating ending for the Bulldogs, who gave up a tying touchdown pass with just over 5 minutes remaining, were stuffed on a ludicrous attempt at a fake punt around midfield, and gave up a 15-yard touchdown run to Hurts with 1:04 remaining to seal a 35-28 defeat.

"There's nothing we can do about it now," said linebacker Monty Rice.

## JGR's Jones inches closer to victory, new contract

Associated Press

LONG POND, Pa. — Erik Jones started the season on the hot seat for Joe Gibbs Racing. Now, 21 races into the season, he is on a hot streak for the best team in NASCAR and making an easy case for a new contract.

With five races left before NASCAR sets the playoff field, Jones is close to clinching a spot in the 16-driver lineup on points, though he is still looking for a win that would guarantee him a shot at a championship.

Kyle Busch, Martin Truex Jr. and last Sunday's Pocono Raceway winner, Denny Hamlin, are the elite stars that make

JGR the class of NASCAR. The 23-year-old Jones could wiggle his way into the conversation should he find his way into victory lane.

Jones was runner-up in the No. 20 Toyota to Hamlin at Pocono, and finished third each of the previous two races at Kentucky and New Hampshire. Jones has scored eight of his 11 top-10 finishes since early May to move up to 13th in the standings. Nine drivers have clinched a playoff spot with wins and Aric Almirola, Ryan Blaney and William Byron would need disastrous finishes to miss the playoffs. Jones, Kyle Larson, Clint Bowyer and Ryan New-

man hold the final spots, with seven-time champion Jimmie Johnson on the outside nipping at the fringe contenders.

Jones plans to make it a four-driver class for JGR in the playoffs.

"We're doing great building points, but it would be great to knock a win out," he said. "We're just so close, it stings a little bit more when you get close to it."

His seven top-five finishes so far are three shy of last year's total, though he won his only career Cup race in July 2018 at Daytona. He failed to advance out of the first round of the playoffs and finished 15th.

Jones opened this season with a third-place finish in the Daytona 500 before falling into a funk: four straight races where he failed to finish better than 13th. He ended that skid with a fourth at Texas, only to finish 14th or worse over the next three races.

The pressure for better results was mounting — JGR has prized prospect Christopher Bell stashed in the second-tier Xfinity Series, thirsty for an open seat. Gibbs has no mercy when it comes to dumping drivers (including Joey Logano, Daniel Suarez, Matt Kesenth) when the next big thing comes along.

# Chiefs motivated by AFC title game loss

Associated Press

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. — The man with the most invested in the success or failure of the Kansas City Chiefs stood beside a practice field at Missouri Western State University and lamented 4 miserable inches.

That's how far offside former pass rusher Dee Ford was in the AFC title game, when Charvarius Ward intercepted Tom Brady with 54 seconds left and Kansas City clinging to the lead.

The yellow flag on the Arrowhead Stadium turf gave New England another shot, and this time Brady made the most of it. He marched the Patriots the rest of the way to a go-ahead score. When the Chiefs forced overtime with a field goal, Brady answered with a winning touchdown.

Four inches. The distance between the Super Bowl and the end of the season.

"Obviously, being as close as we were to the Super Bowl last year, coming up 4 inches short, it allows us to come into the season with a lot of belief," said Clark Hunt, the chairman and most visible face of the Chiefs' ownership family, who stopped through for a workout last weekend.

"I think the players know they have something special," Hunt said. "The players are usually the ones that know what kind of team they have. And I think all those guys are really excited."

Not to mention fueled by that playoff disappointment.

The memories of that cold January evening drove quarterback Patrick Mahomes into the film room for hours on end, churning through game after game. It sent the league MVP onto the sweltering high school practice fields, where he would throw to wide receivers on his summer days off.

"We were super close," Mahomes said. "We fell just short."

The defeat, with the Chiefs' first trip to the Super Bowl in nearly 50 years within their grasp, drove linebacker Reggie Ragland to shed weight and arrive to camp in the best shape of his life.

It lingered in the mind of tight end Travis Kelce as he rehabbed offseason ankle surgery, and it pushed offensive lineman Andrew Wylie, who still stewed about it when he arrived at Missouri Western.

"Everyone obviously was there for that game, and saw that game, and it was a nail-biter," Wylie said, shaking his head. "Just coming back this year with that same level of tenacity."

Chiefs coach Andy Reid knows how hard it can be to reach the Super Bowl.

While he was coaching in Philadelphia, he matched a

record by taking the Eagles to four straight NFC championship games. He lost the first three — to the Rams, Buccaneers and Panthers — before Donovan McNabb & Co. finally reached the Super Bowl following the 2004 season.

The Eagles wound up losing to the Patriots in the Super Bowl. And they lost another NFC title game four years later, leaving Reid a combined 1-5 in conference championship games.

"I think it's great for our football team to have that opportunity, to see the intensity that it takes to play at that level. ... It was a great learning tool," Reid said of last season's near miss, "but now you're starting over. We've got a lot of new people on the football team, new schemes, and then you're taking it one day at a time here in building this thing."

## Versatility a valuable asset for Pittsburgh rookies

Associated Press

LATROBE, Pa. — The message couldn't have been clearer when the Pittsburgh Steelers called Sutton Smith on the final day of the NFL Draft.

Yes, the Steelers liked Smith's production at defensive end at Northern Illinois. His 15 sacks as a senior were kind of hard to miss, particularly for a 6-foot, 233-pound guy who doesn't exactly fit the physical profile of an elite pass rusher.

None of it mattered, however, once the Steelers took a flyer on Smith in the sixth round. Asked what he remembers about his first conversation with the coaching staff, Smith laughed.

"Time to be an athlete," Smith said with a laugh.

They weren't kidding. The star high school running back who scored 32 touchdowns as a senior before transitioning to a defensive end in college is getting a crash course at outside linebacker and fullback in the NFL, often in the same

practice.

"It's a slow work in progress right now," Smith said. "Just trying to figure out the kinks and do what's best for me and the organization right now."

Smith is up for whatever, which is a good thing because there's a decent chance that's what exactly head coach Mike Tomlin might ask Smith to do. The 23-year-old is among a handful of rookies who arrived at their first training camp being asked to do a job far different than the one they were recruited to do in college.

"Young guys with versatility, young guys that are capable to do multiple jobs is an asset," Tomlin said.

Third-round pick Justin Layne signed with Michigan State as a highly coveted wide receiver prospect. Now he's a defensive back. Fifth-round selection Zach Gentry was the first splashy signing for Jim Harbaugh at Michigan, a big-armed quarterback who fig-

ured if he ever reached the pros, he'd do it heaving passes to the end zone. Instead, he evolved into a 6-foot-8 tight end long on athleticism if admittedly a little short in the finer points of run blocking.

"It's a little surreal," Gentry said.

Not that Gentry is complaining. At least, not now anyway. That wasn't exactly the case during Gentry's freshman year. He remembers rolling out on a bootleg shortly after joining the Wolverines and juking a defender, maybe a little too well. Harbaugh asked Gentry to play scout team wide receiver to mimic a player from BYU, Michigan's next opponent. When he excelled at that too, Harbaugh approached Gentry and asked him if he'd consider switching positions.

It didn't go well.

"I was upset," Gentry said. "I was really upset. I tried to transfer. Coach Harbaugh kind of sat me down a handful of

times and explained that if I stick it out, do his regimen and do what I'm supposed to do, I'd go to the NFL as a tight end. I didn't want to believe him because I wanted to play quarterback. But I believe in him and his record with tight ends. I just stuck it out and luckily everything happened the way it did."

That perseverance is one of the reasons Gentry found himself stretching to make a leaping grab at the goal line at Saint Vincent College on Thursday. His fingertip catch drew a nod of approval from Tomlin and a roar from the crowd nestled in the shade behind the end zone.

OK, so it's not as glamorous as quarterback. But it'll do. Gentry admits he can still "sling it around" and yeah, there's a part of him that wouldn't mind standing next to starting quarterback Ben Roethlisberger to see just how he measures up.

"He'd probably school me there," Gentry said. "I haven't been working like that."

# Baez, Quintana lead Cubs past Brewers

Associated Press

CHICAGO — After another rough road trip, Javier Baez and the Chicago Cubs came home to Wrigley Field and came out swinging.

Baez homered, doubled twice and drove in three runs, and the Cubs beat the Milwaukee Brewers 6-2 on Friday.

Jose Quintana pitched solidly into the seventh inning and Jason Heyward also went deep to help Chicago move within one-half game of first-place St. Louis in the NL Central. The third-place Brewers fell 2½ games back of the Cardinals, who have a rare Friday off before starting a two-game series at Oakland.

“We just get here and we relax,” said Baez, who scored twice. “We let the game come to us. With the record, when we go on the road, we’ve got too much pressure to win the game.”

Following a 3-6 three-city swing that ended with an 8-0 drubbing at St. Louis on Thursday night, the Cubs seemed energized from the opening pitch for an afternoon game at their iconic ballpark. They improved to 37-18 at home, but are 21-33 away from Chicago’s North Side.

“Everybody knows our lineup,” Baez said. “Everybody can do damage. We just got to pass the AB to the next guy if you don’t get a hit.”

Manager Joe Maddon is mystified by his team’s road woes, but understands that playing at Wrigley — and a crowd 41,242 on Friday — is a bonus.

“I tell you when you come into this ballpark the energy from the fans is substantial,” Maddon said. “You feel it. I think it begins with that.”

Quintana (9-7) also singled in a run as he won his fifth straight decision. The left-hander allowed two runs on seven hits and struck out five, and was given a five-run lead en route to beating Milwaukee for the second time in a week.

“I know this lineup and I tried to execute my pitches,” Quintana said. “Today just one pitch up, against (Ryan) Braun

was homer. After that everything was working.”

Three Cubs relievers finished with three scoreless innings, yielding just one single and one walk.

Braun hit a solo shot and doubled as Milwaukee lost for the fourth time in five games. Zach Davies (8-5) was roughed up for the third straight start, allowing four runs in four innings.

“The pitches just had a hard time finding the edges of the plate, which he needs to live on,” manager Craig Counsell said. “There were just too many balls in the middle of the plate and falling behind in counts, especially early in the game. He can’t pitch like that.”

## MLB roundup

# Torres’ grand slam powers Yankees past Red Sox

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Gleyber Torres hit a first-inning grand slam, left-hander James Paxton cruised after that and the New York Yankees three-hit the Boston Red Sox in a 4-2 victory Friday night.

Boston has lost five straight for the first time since 2015 and dropped 11½ games behind first-place New York in the AL East.

Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez hit a two-run homer during yet another rocky first inning by Paxton, but Torres bailed him out with his slam off Eduardo Rodriguez (13-5). Paxton (6-6) struck out the side in the second and completed six innings on 100 pitches, allowing two hits and two runs with six strikeouts.

New York earned its major league-leading 35th comeback win.

Yankees relievers Tommy Kahnle and Zack Britton pitched a scoreless inning each, and Aroldis Chapman was perfect in the ninth for his 28th save.

**Astros 10, Mariners 2:** Wade Miley (10-4) had another solid start and host Houston backed him with a season-high six homers in a rout of Seattle.

Yordan Alvarez, Jake Marisnick, Martin Maldonado and Jose Altuve all connected off starter Yusei Kikuchi (4-8) to leave him tied with Justin Verlander for most home runs allowed in the majors this season with 28.

**Padres 5, Dodgers 2:** Eric Lauer (6-8) remained unbeaten against the Dodgers, Eric Hosmer and Wil Myers had three hits apiece and visiting San Diego ruined the big league debut of Los Angeles pitcher Dustin May.

Cody Bellinger supplied the Dodgers’ lone highlight, becoming the fastest player in franchise history to reach 100 home runs. Bellinger’s two-run shot to center in the fourth inning — his 36th, which ties him for the lead in the NL — came in his 401st game and surpasses Mike Piazza, who accomplished it in 422 games.

**Rangers 5, Tigers 4:** Texas reliever Jose Leclerc hung

on for a save, then fired the ball onto the right field roof at Globe Life Park after his team beat visiting Detroit.

The Tigers scored twice in a messy ninth inning and had runners on second and third with two outs when Jeimer Candelario hit a grounder to first baseman Danny Santana, who flipped to Leclerc covering the bag to end it. Leclerc took a couple of steps and let fly, the ball sailing far over the seats.

**Twins 11, Royals 9:** Nelson Cruz homered and drove in five runs in host Minnesota’s win over Kansas City.

**Blue Jays 5, Orioles 2:** Freddy Galvis had a home run among his three hits, Brandon Drury also went deep and visiting Toronto beat Baltimore for its season-high fifth straight victory.

**Indians 7, Angels 3:** Yasiel Puig drove in his first two runs for host Cleveland and Mike Clevinger (6-2) won his fifth straight by beating Los Angeles.

**Reds 5, Braves 2:** Joey Votto homered and drove in three runs, Alex Wood (1-0) pitched 6

2/3 strong innings and visiting Cincinnati beat NL East-leading Atlanta.

**Pirates 8, Mets 4:** Starling Marte’s three-run homer in the seventh inning broke open a tight game and host Pittsburgh snapped New York’s seven-game winning streak.

**Rockies 5, Giants 4:** Rockies center fielder David Dahl was carted off the field after spraining his ankle while making an awkward catch, and substitute Ian Desmond hit a tiebreaking double in the seventh inning that lifted host Colorado over San Francisco.

**Nationals 3, Diamondbacks 0:** Late lineup addition Matt Adams broke a scoreless tie with a sixth-inning double and Joe Ross (1-3) won his first game in more than two years as visiting Washington opened a nine-game road trip with a victory over Arizona.

**White Sox 4, Phillies 3 (15):** Jose Abreu hit an RBI single off outfielder Roman Quinn (0-1) in the 15th inning and visiting Chicago outlasted Philadelphia.