

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Grief and grievance

Trump faces protests as he visits Dayton, El Paso in wake of shootings

Associated Press

DAYTON, Ohio — Protesters greeted President Donald Trump's arrival in Dayton on Wednesday, blaming his incendiary rhetoric for inflaming political and racial tensions in the country and demanding action on gun control as he visited survivors of last weekend's mass shootings and saluted first responders.

The president and first lady Melania Trump began their visit at the hospital where many of the victims of Sunday's attack were treated. Reporters traveling with the president were kept out of view, but White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham tweeted that the couple had "been stopping between rooms to thank the hard-working medical staff. Very powerful moments for all!"

Outside Miami Valley Hospital, at least 200 protesters gathered, hoping to send a message to the president by calling for action. Some said Trump was not welcome in their city. There were Trump supporters, as well.

Emotions are still raw in the aftermath of the early Sunday morning shooting rampage that left 10 dead, including the gunman, in the city's popular Oregon entertainment district. Critics contend Trump's own words have contributed to a combustible climate that has spawned violence in cities including El Paso, Texas, where another shooter killed 22 people over the weekend.

Trump rejected that assertion as he left the White House, strongly criticizing those who say he bears some responsibility for the nation's divisions.

"My critics are political people," Trump said, noting the apparent political leanings of the shooter in the Dayton killings and suggesting the man was supportive of Democrats.

"Had nothing to do with President Trump," Trump said. "So these are people that are looking for political gain."

He also defended his rhetoric on issues including immigration, claiming instead that he "brings people together. Our country is doing incredibly well."

Some 85% of U.S. adults believe the tone and nature of political debate has become more negative, with a majority saying Trump has changed things for the worse, according to recent Pew Research Center polling.

And more than three quarters, 78%, say that elected officials who use heated or aggressive language to talk about certain people or groups make violence against those people more likely.

In Dayton, raw anger and pain were on display as protesters chanted "Ban those guns" and "Do something!" during Trump's visit. This White House typically goes out of its way to shield protesters from Trump's view.

Holding a sign that said "Not Welcome Here," Lynnell Graham said she thinks Trump's response to the shootings has been insincere.

"To me he comes off as fake," she said.

But in El Paso, where more protests were expected, Raul Melendez, whose father-in-law, David Johnson, was killed in

Saturday's shooting, said the most appropriate thing Trump could do was to meet with relatives of the victims.

"It shows that he actually cares, if he talks to individual families," said Melendez, who credits Johnson with helping his 9-year-old daughter survive the attack by pushing her under a counter. Melendez, an Army veteran and the son of Mexican immigrants, said he holds only the shooter responsible for the attack.

"That person had the intent to hurt people, he already had it," he said. "No one's words would have triggered that."

Local Democratic lawmakers who'd expressed concern about the visit said Trump had nonetheless hit the right notes Wednesday.

"He was comforting, he did the right things, and Melania did the right things. It's his job to comfort people," said Sen. Sharrod Brown, who nonetheless said he was "very concerned about a president that divides in his rhetoric and plays to race in his rhetoric."

'Red flag' gun laws plan has bipartisan backing on Hill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Despite frequent mass shootings, Congress has proved to be unable to pass substantial gun violence legislation, largely because of resistance from Republicans.

But a bipartisan proposal by Sens. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., is gaining momentum following weekend mass shootings in Texas and Ohio that left

31 people dead. The emerging plan would create a federal grant program to encourage states to adopt "red flag" laws to take guns away from people believed to be dangers to themselves or others. A similar bill never came up for a vote in the GOP-controlled Senate last year, but both parties express hope that this year will be different. President Donald Trump has signaled support.

"We must make sure that those judged to pose a grave risk to public safety do not have access to firearms and that if they do those firearms can be taken through rapid due process," Trump said in a White House speech on Monday.

Many mass shootings "involved individuals who showed signs of violent behavior that are either ignored or not followed up on," said Graham,

chairman of the powerful Senate Judiciary Committee. "State red flag laws will provide the tools for law enforcement to do something about many of these situations before it's too late."

On Tuesday, Blumenthal said there's "a growing wave of support on both sides of the aisle" for the red-flag plan — more momentum in fact "than any other gun violence plan" being debated in Congress.

Turkey, US to work on Syrian safe zone

The Washington Post

ISTANBUL — A Turkish military offensive against Syrian Kurdish fighters appeared to be averted as the United States and Turkey announced Wednesday that they had agreed to “address Turkish security concerns” and work together on the establishment of a safe zone in northern Syria.

Statements released by the two governments, using virtually identical language, contained little detail about what exactly had been agreed upon. Critically, the statements, released by the U.S. Embassy in Ankara and Turkey’s Defense Ministry, did not say whether the thorniest issue — the size

and complexion of the safe zone — had been resolved.

President Donald Trump’s administration had worked furiously in recent weeks to head off a Turkish offensive against a U.S.-backed force in Syria that had led the ground offensive against the Islamic State. The force controls large swaths of territory along the Syrian-Turkish border and is dominated by Syrian Kurdish fighters, whom Turkey considers a threat to its own security.

The threat of Turkish military action came after months of haggling over the establishment of a “safe zone” that would push the Syrian Kurdish fighters back from the border.

Over U.S. objections, Turkey had argued for a larger safe zone and for sole Turkish control over the area.

U.S. officials had feared that a Turkish invasion could occur as soon as Thursday. The agreement announced Wednesday said that the U.S. and Turkish delegations had agreed to a “rapid implementation of initial measures to address Turkey’s security concerns.” A joint operations center in Turkey would “coordinate and manage the establishment of the safe zone together.”

A U.S. official said that “considerable agreement” had been reached but that there are “still issues to work out.”

“This gives us room to take initial joint Turkish-U.S. actions,” said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

It was unclear whether progress had been made on considerable differences between the two governments on the size and patrolling of a safe zone.

That statement also said that the safe zone “shall become a peace corridor, and every effort shall be made so that displaced Syrians can return to their country” — language that appeared aimed at addressing rising anxiety in Turkey about the growing population of Syrian refugees.

Defense secretary works on stability at Pentagon, has eye on China goals

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The career trajectory of newly minted Defense Secretary Mark Esper appears custom-crafted for someone aspiring to the Pentagon’s highest office: Army infantry officer, Defense Department bureaucrat, industry lobbyist and well-connected congressional aide.

Esper must now demonstrate that he can translate his experience into success leading the world’s largest bureaucracy and navigating the sometimes opposing interests of military leaders and President Donald Trump.

In his first interview since being confirmed last month, Esper laid out his vision for restoring stability to the Pentagon after a period of leadership upheaval while also ensuring that the military can make good on its long-delayed goal of regaining its advantage over Beijing.

Esper, 55, who was a lobbyist for weapons maker Raytheon when Trump picked him to be Army secretary in 2017, said he would establish new metrics and processes for keeping staff

focused on China-related goals while tapping his relationships with key Trump administration figures such as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Esper shared a stage with his West Point classmate this week as he touched down for a joint State-Defense Department meeting in Australia during his inaugural tour of Asia as Pentagon chief.

Esper promised to shield the department from politicization through personal example.

“Part of my role is to exhibit the right behavior,” he said. “This is something I messaged to the leadership a week ago: We are an apolitical organization.”

So far Esper’s plans on China closely track the blueprint laid out in a major 2018 defense strategy for matching strength with the advanced militaries of Moscow and Beijing that was formulated by Trump’s first defense secretary, retired Marine Gen. Jim Mattis. “We have a very good national defense strategy, and now the challenge is implementing it,” Esper said from his office overlooking Potomac, Md.

Mara Karlin, a former Pen-

tagon official who directs the Strategic Studies program at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced and International Studies, said Esper had demonstrated adept management in his previous job by bringing a skeptical eye to his evaluation of Army programs. Now, he will be judged by whether he delivers on the strategy.

Esper, who was nominated in June after the previous acting defense secretary, Pat Shanahan, stepped aside suddenly for personal reasons, takes control of the Pentagon at a moment defined in part by its struggle to anticipate and understand the wishes of Trump.

The administration’s steps to restrict interagency deliberations have compounded the impact of the president’s unpredictable decision-making style. More significantly, military officials have also had difficulty reconciling Trump’s demands with what they have traditionally viewed as core U.S. defense interests.

It remains to be seen whether Esper can publicly reinforce traditional Pentagon positions,

such as reassuring anxious allies and making a case for maintaining counterterrorism missions overseas, while advancing the president’s priorities. Well-versed in policy matters and the arcane ways of the sprawling Pentagon bureaucracy, Esper sought to minimize those differences.

“DOD does have a strong voice out there and we will exercise it,” he said. “But again I’m going to balance those two things as well because, at the end of the day, we’re advancing America’s interests.”

Unlike Mattis and Shanahan, Esper served in partisan positions before joining the Trump administration, including serving as aide to then-Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel and national security czar to a Senate majority leader, then-Republican Sen. Bill Frist.

As secretary, Esper will have to juggle the Pentagon’s China agenda with the specter of conflict with Iran, all while addressing the fallout from Trump’s rocky relationship with allies needed for both.

AAFES ends physical sales of games, movies

BY BRIAN FERGUSON

Stars and Stripes

The Army and Air Force Exchange Service will no longer sell DVDs, Blu-rays and video games in its stores or online by the end of the year, a spokesman said Wednesday.

"Last year, 83% of all computer and video games were sold digitally while only 17% were purchased in physical form," AAFES spokesman Chris Ward said.

The lagging results contributed to the decision to end physical media sales.

"The Exchange regularly makes adjust-

ments to its assortment to ensure it has the most popular products on its shelves," Ward said in an email.

To compensate, the Exchange is expanding its assortment of online digital entertainment alternatives from leading companies. These include a discounted offer for Hulu streaming service, as well as TV and event programming provided through Exchange contractors, he said.

The removal of DVDs, Blu-rays and video games will not include the removal of players and consoles. The store will also expand its assortment of Smart Home and

eSports products.

"Assortment shifts that reflect changes in demand are critical to the Exchange mission as 100% of the organization's earnings support critical quality-of-life programs to include child, youth and school services, armed forces recreation centers and more," Ward said.

According to the Motion Picture Association of America, home entertainment digital demand has increased by 170% globally since 2014. During this same period, demand for physical media has dropped by 48%.

Bill requires tracking of troops exposed to toxins

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

Retired Lt. Col. Susan Lukas looked no further than her own experience when weighing the benefits of legislation to help servicemembers who have been exposed to toxic materials.

Now a legislative director for the Reserve Organization of America, the former member of the Air Force Reserve was on active duty at the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001. At the time, Lukas never considered the toxins that she was breathing in during the terrorist attack.

"As time went on, I started having a problem with my throat and started getting tests. What happened is I ultimately had lung damage from 9/11," she said.

In the months following the attack, Lukas said she had problems with breathing and coughing, but wrote it off as part of flu season. It took several years and a worsening of her symptoms to put the two together. Had documentation of the exposure been in her medical records, Lukas believes diagnosis and proper treatment could have come more quickly.

A bill now attached to the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2020 requires the medical records of servicemembers to include

whether they were exposed to toxic materials, in an effort to ease access to disability compensation and treatment at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Lawmakers are reconciling the two versions of the legislation into a final version, and it is expected to move forward following their August recess.

Known as the Occupational and Environmental Transparency Health Act, or OATH Act, the bill stands to affect all servicemembers as toxic exposure can happen at home or while serving on deployment. Even troops living in barracks or military family housing that was found to be unsafe because of mold or lead paint would have the exposure documented, said Rep. John Garamendi, D-Calif., who introduced the bill alongside Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga.

"[A servicemember's] health is jeopardized and when they get ill and it is difficult to understand the relationship between a previous chemical exposure and the illness because that information is not available," Garamendi said July 25.

Toxic materials often associated with servicemembers' illnesses include the herbicide Agent Orange, fumes from burn pits, chemical foam used in firefighting and mold in living quarters.

Taliban car bomb attack kills at least 14 in Kabul

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — A Taliban car bomb aimed at Afghan security forces ripped through a busy Kabul neighborhood on Wednesday, killing 14 people and wounding 145 — most of them women, children and other civilians — shortly after the extremist group and the United States reported progress on negotiating an end to Afghanistan's nearly 18-year war.

The bombing during morning rush hour was one of the worst attacks in Kabul this year, and it again raised fears among Afghans about what will happen once the estimated 20,000 U.S. and NATO troops in their country go home.

The explosives-packed car detonated at a security checkpoint outside police headquarters in a minority Shiite neighborhood in western Kabul, police spokesman Firdaus Faramarz said.

The Taliban said they had targeted a recruitment center for security forces.

Ninety-two of the wounded were civilians, Deputy Interior Minister Khoshal Sadat told reporters. Four police officers were among those killed, he said.

The attack took place as many Kabul residents were preparing for the Muslim holi-

day Eid al-Adha, which begins Sunday. A large plume of smoke rose over the city. Some nearby buildings were left in rubble.

"I was having breakfast in a restaurant when the explosion happened," said Mohammad Qasem. As windows shattered, he and others rushed into the busy street.

Any Taliban attack is a barrier to the peace process, presidential spokesman Sediq Seddiqi told reporters, vowing that "Afghan security forces are strong and can protect the Afghan population."

President Ashraf Ghani's government said such attacks apparently are meant to strengthen the Taliban position at the negotiating table but would not succeed.

On Tuesday the Taliban warned Afghans to boycott the Sept. 28 presidential election and avoid campaign rallies that "could become potential targets." The vote already has been delayed for months over security and organizational concerns.

The Taliban have been staging near-daily attacks against Afghan forces across the country, saying the war will continue as long as U.S. and NATO forces are still in Afghanistan.

The Taliban now control roughly half of the country and are at their strongest since 2001.

US ambassador to Russia will resign

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — U.S. Ambassador to Russia Jon Huntsman Jr. has submitted his resignation, signaling the end of a two-year stint during what he called a historically difficult time in relations between the two countries.

Huntsman is planning to return to Utah amid speculation that he may again run for governor, said Salt Lake Chamber president Derek Miller, who served under him during his previous tenure.

Huntsman, a Republican, left the Utah governor's office in 2009 when former President Barack Obama tapped him as ambassador to China.

He was popular in the state

and had been elected to his second term the year before.

Huntsman mounted a brief run for president in 2011.

In 2017, President Donald Trump named him as ambassador to Russia as the U.S. investigated Moscow's meddling in the 2016 election.

In a resignation later dated Monday and first obtained by The Salt Lake Tribune, Huntsman said he was honored by the trust Trump placed in him "during this historically difficult period in bilateral relations" that has included expulsions and forced departures of his staff.

In the letter, Huntsman also urged the U.S. to hold Russia accountable for behavior that threatens American allies.

He said he wants to leave to reconnect with family and home responsibilities.

Huntsman is expected to serve through Oct. 3.

In Russia, the state-run Tass news agency quoted an unnamed spokesperson in the foreign ministry as saying Huntsman is a professional, but "the domestic political state of affairs in the U.S." made it impossible to fully develop bilateral ties.

Ahead of his expected return to Utah, it's unclear whether Huntsman would seek to return to the governor's mansion in 2020, but if he does step into the race he would have immediate credibility and popularity, Miller said.

"I think he's looking at it very

closely," he said. A recent poll from the Salt Lake Chamber found Huntsman nearly tied with the first declared candidate, Republican Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox, in a hypothetical general election, but trailing him among GOP voters who will decide the party nomination, Miller said.

Cox said in a statement Tuesday that he's glad Huntsman has decided to return. "If he decides to run for governor again, it would make me a better candidate," Cox said.

Other potential gubernatorial candidates include retiring U.S. Rep. Rob Bishop and former Utah House Speaker Greg Hughes, both Republicans.

FBI opens domestic terrorism probe into California food festival shooting

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The FBI has opened a domestic terrorism investigation into the mass shooting at a California food festival after it discovered a "target list" compiled by the gunman whose relatives apologized Tuesday and said they were "horrified" by his actions.

The FBI disclosure came during a funeral mass for Keyla Salazar, 13, a middle schooler who was one of three people killed on July 28 by gunman Santino William Legan during the Gilroy Garlic Festival. Thirteen others were injured.

It was the first of three mass shootings within a week that killed 34 people in Gilroy; Dayton, Ohio; and El Paso, Texas. The attacks have prompted widespread calls for gun reform and heightened mental health care.

The FBI has opened domestic terrorism cases in two of the attacks.

In Gilroy, the FBI cited the 19-year-old Legan's list of targets that included religious institutions, courthouses, federal buildings and both major political parties in the U.S.

Federal investigators and Legan's family said they have not been able to come up with a motive for the festival attack.

However, John Bennett, FBI agent in charge in San Francisco, said the agency cannot rule out white nationalism as a factor.

On the day of the attack, Legan urged his Instagram followers to read a 19th-century book popular with white supremacists who follow extremist websites. He also complained about

overcrowding towns and paving open space to make room for "hordes" of Latinos and Silicon Valley whites.

The FBI says Legan appeared to be interested in conflicting violent ideologies, but authorities have not found a written explanation for his attack or any indication of previous violent behavior.

U.S. law does not contain a specific domestic terrorism charge. As a result, the FBI looks for possible hate crimes, weapons and other violations. Simply being a member or showing support for a white supremacist organization is not unlawful.

However, such links are a crime in foreign terrorism cases, even if the investigation doesn't involve accusations of violence.

Family members of Legan released a statement saying they were "deeply shocked and horrified" by his actions. They also apologized to the victims and their families.

"We have never and would never condone the hateful thoughts and ideologies that led to this event, and it is impossible to reconcile this with the son we thought we knew," the family said in a statement released by attorney Chuck Smith.

Police say Legan fired 39 shots from an AK-47-style rifle before turning the gun on himself during a shootout with three Gilroy police officers. He was wearing a bullet-resistant vest and carrying several high-capacity magazines, with more ammunition on the ground and in a bag in a nearby creek.

Russia says drone test a success

Associated Press

MOSCOW — The Russian military says a heavy drone it's developing has made a successful maiden flight.

The Defense Ministry on Wednesday released a video showing the Okhotnik (Hunter) taking off, performing maneuvers and landing. The ministry has said that the drone, which has advanced reconnaissance and stealth capabilities, first flew for 20 minutes Saturday.

The wedge-shaped heavy drone developed by the Sukhoi company is a major leap compared with other unmanned aerial vehicles previously developed in Russia.

The project has been veiled in secrecy, but Russian media reports claimed that the new drone weighs 20 tons loaded and has a range of up to 3,100 miles.

The single-engine Okhotnik bears a visual resemblance to Lockheed Martin's U.S. RQ-170 Sentinel drone.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Teen charged in death of cat shot with arrow

MA BLACKSTONE — Police said a 17-year-old boy faces charges in connection with the death of a pet cat shot with an arrow.

Acting Blackstone Police Chief Gregory Gilmore said the teen was identified as a suspect through several tips from the public.

Gilmore said investigators executing a search warrant at the boy's home found a bow and several arrows similar to the one found in the cat.

The suspect's name wasn't made public because of his age.

An anonymous donor offered a \$500 reward for information leading to an arrest.

Bear electrocuted climbing utility pole

CO STEAMBOAT SPRINGS — Wildlife officials said a bear was killed by electric shock when it climbed a utility pole in northwestern Colorado to escape traffic and touched power lines.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife officer Jack Taylor said a resident saw the bear trying to cross a county road when an oncoming car scared it. It ran into a field and climbed the pole.

Taylor said Parks and Wildlife received two reports last year of bears being electrocuted.

Accused assailant accidentally stabs self

CA ROSEVILLE — Police in Northern California said they arrested a woman who was trying to stab her husband and sister-in-law outside a bank when she accidentally stabbed herself in the

abdomen.

The Roseville Police Department said officers responding to a call about a fight outside a bank found Ziaoxin Wu, 32, injured with a stab wound.

The department said Wu and her husband were finalizing their separation at the bank and that the man had brought his sister for support.

Police said Wu became upset and took a large kitchen knife out of her purse and tried to stab her husband's sister. When her husband intervened, Wu tried to stab him but instead stabbed herself.

2 people bitten by sharks minutes apart

FL NEW SMYRNA BEACH — Authorities said two people were bitten by sharks minutes apart at the same Florida beach.

Volusia County Beach safety officials told news outlets the two bites occurred at New Smyrna Beach.

Authorities said a 23-year-old woman was bitten on the left hand and wrist, which required her to receive stitches.

A short time later, a 21-year-old man was bitten on his right foot and was treated at the scene. Neither bite was life-threatening.

Woman stabbed in dispute in subway

NY NEW YORK — Police said a woman was stabbed on a New York subway platform in the middle of the afternoon during an argument with two people.

The 23-year-old victim suffered wounds to the stomach and her left arm at the Utica Avenue station in Crown Heights. Police said the three appeared to be quarreling when she was attacked.

A man is in custody, but authorities believe it was his female companion who stabbed the victim and is still at large.

Man shoots at trees he thought occupied

UT SALT LAKE CITY — A man in northern Utah who told police he was trying to shoot people he believed were living in his trees was charged with more than 30 felonies.

The Deseret News reported Timmy Andrew Gurule, 64, was charged with drug distribution, discharge of a firearm and related crimes.

According to the documents he told the officer there were "30 to 50 people living in the trees on his property."

Detectives found 24 firearms, ammunition, and marijuana in Gurule's home. Authorities also say his blood tested positive for meth, amphetamines and THC.

Man charged in theft of phone in courtroom

MI MOUNT CLEMENS — A cellphone left unattended on a courtroom bench proved too enticing a target for a suburban Detroit man appearing before the judge on another matter.

The Macomb County prosecutor's office said that the man was waiting to be sentenced in Macomb Circuit Court for a 2017 traffic case when he saw the phone on the bench. He sat beside the phone and placed his hat atop it before sliding it into his pocket.

The phone's owner returned and asked a courtroom deputy for assistance when he saw it had been removed.

The deputy reviewed the courtroom's video feed, which recorded the theft.

The man was charged with larceny.

Museum officials learn stamp is fake

NE OMAHA — Representatives of a small aviation museum in southwestern Iowa hoped they had stumbled upon a rare postage stamp potentially worth a fortune. But experts at a national stamp convention in Omaha delivered the sad truth: It isn't the real thing, after all.

The Iowa Aviation Museum in Greenfield, Iowa, had what it thought was an "Inverted Jenny" and brought it to the Omaha gathering.

Ken Martin, of the American Philatelic Society, said experts knew immediately the stamp wasn't authentic because "it wasn't the right size."

Old marriage records are to be digitized

MO CAPE GIRARDEAU — Thousands of marriage records in southeast Missouri's Cape Girardeau County will be digitized and stored electronically as part of an effort to preserve historic documents.

County recorder of deeds Crew Blattner said the work is critical because nondigitized records can be lost if there's a natural disaster or water damage.

The effort also will allow records to be searched through an online database.

Some of the marriage records predate both Cape Girardeau County, founded in 1812, and Missouri, which gained statehood in 1821.

From wire reports

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Unproven Ohio St. QB ready for pressure

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio—Justin Fields knows all about heat. He grew up in Georgia.

But the pressure cooker in which the celebrated prep quarterback now finds himself is about to get turned up.

The pressure is always crushing on anyone who starts at quarterback for Ohio State. But Fields, who transferred from Georgia last winter, is expected to pick up where record-breaking Heisman Trophy candidate and first-round NFL Draft pick Dwayne Haskins Jr. left off.

Fields, a 20-year-old sophomore, has never started a college game. He saw only limited playing time in his freshman season, mostly in mop-up duty behind Jake Fromm.

He comes to Ohio State with great expectations and great hype. He was one of the highest-rated high school prospects at any position in 2018. He is said to have nearly the arm that Haskins does but with the speed and elusiveness his predecessor lacks.

New Ohio State coach Ryan Day is the first to note that Fields must still earn the starting job. But that's really just a formality.

"Physically, he checks all the boxes — running, athleticism, size, power, throwing ability, arm strength, accuracy, intelligence," Day said. "He has all those things. Now it's just a matter in August of putting

on the field and seeing what kind of product we have.

"But in order to learn, you have to fail," Day continued. "Unfortunately, we don't have the luxury of failing a lot in practice and spending a few years as an understudy. Some of those failures are going to happen in a game, and there's going to be a lot of deep breaths."

In the months after spring practice, Fields put in his work. He threw with his receivers nearly every day.

"Right when you come into a new place you can't just come in and just act like you're a leader," he said. "You have to kind of get used to the guys and build relationships with them so they trust you. Then you can step out and become a leader."

Austin Mack is expected to be one of Fields' top targets. He also has something to prove after missing the final six games last year with a foot injury. He was hurt in the humiliating loss to unranked Purdue, a defeat that kept the Buckeyes out of the playoffs.

Mack said he and receivers K.J. Hill and Binjimen Victor have taken it upon themselves to help the new guy get up to speed.

"He came from Georgia so he came from a good program that's used to winning," Mack said. "He's been there, he knows what it's like. He just doesn't know our culture. So the biggest thing for us is to help get him acclimated, get him used to

being in that huddle. Like, 'Hey bro, speak up, you're good, take control.'"

Fields symbolizes the new normal for college football, with the transfer portal providing a way out for impatient players who don't want to wait to play.

Tate Martell had been waiting his turn behind Haskins but transferred to Miami after Fields arrived. After spring practice, quarterback Matthew Baldwin left for TCU.

At Georgia, Fields was the target of a racist comment from the stands. That may have helped his argument for immediate NCAA eligibility. Typically, a player has to sit out a season.

He calls the move to Ohio State a "business decision" that allows him to play for Day, who helped develop Haskins into an NFL draft pick.

The backup is expected to be Gunnar Hoak, who played at Kentucky and also came via the transfer portal as a graduate student.

Fields says he's ready to handle the spotlight. He basked in it as a five-star recruit in high school while taking part in the Netflix documentary "QB1: Beyond the Lights."

"You've just got to embrace it," he said. "All this hype and all that, you just got to back it up, not let everything get to your head."

Buckeye Nation will be waiting. And not so patiently.

Running back Moss helps fuel Utah's drive

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — After posting back-to-back 1,000-yard seasons, Zack Moss appeared primed for a jump to the NFL.

He turned more than a few heads when he chose to return to Utah for his senior season.

The decision felt like a simple one for Moss. He wanted to be the first in his family to graduate college. The 5-foot-10 running back also believed he had some unfinished business on the field.

"The only thing I'm worrying about is going out and having a successful season with my team and trying to get this Pac-12 championship down and sealed for us," Moss told reporters after the Utes opened their fall camp.

Utah has graduated from underdog to the preseason pick to win the Pac-12 title. Moss is helping to drive those expectations.

The senior ran for 1,096 yards and 11 touchdowns last season before missing Utah's final five games with a knee injury. He averaged 6.1 yards per carry and helped the Utes average 41 points per game during a four-game October winning streak that helped Utah earn the school's first Pac-12 South title a month later. The Utes lost to Washington in the Pac-12 title game.

"He's a great player and I love having him next to me," quarterback Tyler Huntley said. "I feel comfortable with him next to me. It's going to be a great season."

An evolving role appears to

be in the cards for Moss. New offensive coordinator Andy Ludwig has mixed in some screen and checkdown passes to the running backs. Ludwig said his ideal number of carries per game for Moss is 20 to 23 and he wants to find ways to keep him fresh through the course of a game and the season as a whole.

It could mean that Moss, who has 38 career catches through three seasons, could be a factor as a receiver as well as a runner this year.

"He'll catch some balls," coach Kyle Whittingham said. "Not only on screen passes, but he'll be involved in some routes up the field."

Moss has a rare opportunity to become the first Utah running back to post three career

1,000-yard rushing seasons. He ranks fourth in school history with 2,651 career yards and needs just 569 yards to overtake Eddie Johnson as the career rushing yards leader.

Moss isn't focused that far ahead at the moment. His energies are devoted to rebuilding his confidence and getting back to the level he had reached before his injury in November.

"I'm going to go out here and work just like the other guys," Moss said. "Give my all. Just make sure I'm ready for Game 1. I'm not going to hold anything back."

But even in the spotlight, Moss said his team has not forgotten its underdog roots.

"This team, at the heart and the core, still has an underdog mentality and it's very good for us," Moss said.

Beasley enjoying camp with new team

Associated Press

PITTSFORD, N.Y. — Seven seasons with the Cowboys left Cole Beasley wondering what the big deal was in Dallas.

The slot receiver is, so far, finding things are much better in Buffalo.

“It’s the most fun I’ve had playing football in a long, long time, man. Since high school,” the 30-year-old said following a recent practice at the Bills’ training camp site in suburban Rochester, N.Y.

And the main reason for that is it’s not Dallas, where Beasley said he felt overlooked while battling to keep his spot in the pecking order on a team which relied more on big-play receivers, such as Dez Bryant, and workhorse running backs, such as Ezekiel Elliott.

“I really feel like it’s a respect thing,” he said. “I felt like in Dallas, it was always an uphill battle trying to fight to get them to respect me.”

It made no difference whether he established himself as

one of the NFL’s most dependable third-down targets, or he helped the Cowboys to a 13-3 record in 2016 with a team-leading and career-best 833 yards receiving.

“I always wanted more there, and they were just like, ‘We don’t do that,’” Beasley added. “That’s why I think maybe it’s more fun now, and I can just play free and don’t have to worry. I’m right where I want to be.”

In Buffalo, the 5-foot-8 undrafted player out of Southern Methodist is being asked to play a central role in what had been a patchwork offense that underwent a major overhaul in free agency this offseason. Aside from signing Beasley to a four-year, \$29 million contract, the Bills also signed speedster John Brown, tight end Tyler Kroft, running back Frank Gore, and retooled their offensive line by signing six new players.

The objective was upgrading a unit that finished 30th in the NFL in yards gained and points scored, and help spur quarter-

back Josh Allen’s development entering his second season.

Beasley was also intrigued to work with Bills offensive coordinator Brian Daboll, who appreciates the importance of the slot receiver after having previously worked with Julian Edelman and Wes Welker in New England.

“I can just see it in the routes he’ll let me run. And if I mess up, he’s like, ‘I know you’ll get it. Don’t worry about it,’” Beasley said of Daboll. “He gives me that time to develop. Only a coach who really believes in you is going to let you do that.”

There have been signs of Buffalo’s passing attack starting to click with Beasley and Brown’s presence.

On the third day of camp, Allen torched the Bills defense by making several long completions to Brown.

The next day, with top cornerback Tre’Davious White shadowing Brown, Allen turned his attention to Beasley, who made numerous short catches over the middle.

The two can also make it difficult for defenses in the red zone because of their shifty ability to break off the line and find an opening.

“I feed off Cole and he feeds off me,” said Brown, who noted he’s learning more about playing in the slot from Beasley.

The way the two complement each other was enough for running back LeSean McCoy to break his camp-long silence with the media.

“The thing with them is pick your poison,” McCoy told The Associated Press, before comparing the two to his former Eagles teammates DeSean Jackson and Jeremy Maclin.

“It’s like my old Philly days with having that elusive guy and having that speed guy outside,” he said. “I was telling Beasley, joking with him, and said, ‘You guys will really help out the run game.’”

Asked by how much, McCoy winked and said: “Wooo! You’ll see. You’re going to see, baby.”

Second-year RB Chubb poised for breakout season

Associated Press

BEREA, Ohio — Nick Chubb skipped the parties in college. Not his style.

He was reserved and quiet at Georgia, keeping to himself or working out in the Bulldogs’ weight room. The soft-spoken kid from historic Chubbtown was courteous and driven off the field, tough and powerful on it.

Browns coach Freddie Kitchens had friends who coached Chubb and who say he hasn’t changed.

“He’s the same guy as he was when he showed up as a freshman,” Kitchens said. “He is just bigger, faster and stronger now.”

And becoming one of the NFL’s best backs.

After rushing for 996 yards as a rookie, Chubb could be on the verge of a breakout season

with the high-flying Browns, whose offense won’t simply consist of quarterback Baker Mayfield dropping back and rifling passes to either Odell Beckham Jr. or Jarvis Landry.

Not with Chubb around. “I will just go ahead and put it bluntly to you,” Kitchens said. “We will not be a pass-happy team. We will do what we need to do to win the game or attempt to win the game. We are going to run the football.”

Chubb will carry the load.

A second-round pick in 2018, the 23-year-old Chubb started slowly last season. He played behind Carlos Hyde and was given the ball just 16 times in his first six games before getting his first start in Week 7 and rushing for 80 yards on 18 tries against Tennessee.

But after coach Hue Jackson was fired and Kitchens got promoted from running backs

coach to offensive coordinator, Chubb became the Browns’ workhorse.

Giddy-up. Chubb posted three 100-yard games in the final seven weeks and became the first Browns player since 1975 to score a rushing TD in five straight games. He ripped off a club-record 92-yard scoring run in a win over Atlanta, his gallop made more famous by Browns radio announcer Jim Donovan’s “Chubba-Wubba-Hub” call.

Chubb, who overcame a serious left knee injury at Georgia, was in line to eclipse 1,000 yards and actually broke the milestone in the season finale at Baltimore only to be tackled for a loss on his final attempt and finish 4 yards short.

While some players would be devastated by the near-miss, Chubb took it in stride.

“Let me tell you something

about Nick Chubb, and it sums it up for him,” Kitchens said. “Not a word was mentioned about it, not a word. I even apologized to him, but not a word was mentioned about going up and under 1,000 after he had 1,000. That tells you what Nick Chubb is, what he is here for and how he approaches the game, and what the game is about for him.”

“It is about winning. It is about winning a championship.”

Chubb enters this season as Cleveland’s primary back, a role he may wind up sharing later in the year once Kareem Hunt serves his eight-game suspension.

The duo of Chubb and Hunt, the league’s rushing champion as a rookie in 2017 for Kansas City, could be tops in the league.

“It’s going to be scary,” Chubb said.

Mets win for 12th time in 13 games

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Zack Wheeler expected to be pitching in a playoff chase this month. As of two weeks ago, that meant his bags were packed — a recommendation from Mets general manager Brodie Van Wagenen as the trade deadline neared, rumors swirled and New York trailed 12 teams in the NL standings.

The right-hander was going to land with whichever contender wanted him most. Improbably, that turned out to be the Mets.

Wheeler ground up Miami over eight innings, Wilson Ramos and Pete Alonso homered, and New York beat the Marlins 5-0 Tuesday night

for its 12th win in 13 games, including five of six since the deadline. The hard-charging Mets improved to 58-56 a night after surpassing the .500 mark for the first time since early May.

“We know how good we can be and how good we are,” Wheeler said. “We’re shooting for it.”

New York has the best record in baseball since the All-Star break and entered the day 2½ games behind Philadelphia for an NL wild card despite looking like a sure-fire seller in late July — two weeks ago, the Mets trailed every NL team except the Marlins and Pirates.

Wheeler (9-6) remained in Flushing to aid an unlikely postseason hunt. After throw-

ing seven scoreless innings against the White Sox a day after the deadline, he cruised through eight on 99 pitches against the Marlins, allowing eight hits and striking out five with 13 groundball outs.

“That’s the goal every time is to get groundballs and get easier outs,” Wheeler said. “I was able to get inside on them tonight and work there.”

Mets manager Mickey Callaway said the whole club got a “huge jolt” when the deadline passed and Wheeler was still with New York.

“Hearing all the rumors and stuff like that, it’s kind of, you don’t necessarily take it to heart because it’s not true until it happens,” Alonso said. “But the fact he wasn’t traded

is big.”

Todd Frazier had an RBI double in the first inning and Ramos added a three-run homer in the third. Alonso smoked a solo shot in the fifth, his second connection in two games after going nine without one. Alonso has 36 homers for the season.

Wheeler had two runners on with one out in the sixth and seventh innings but escaped both jams. He ended the sixth with consecutive strikeouts and got out of the seventh with another punchout and by breaking pinch-hitter Harold Ramirez’s bat on a soft lineout.

After Wheeler stranded another runner in the eighth, Robert Gsellman pitched the ninth.

MLB roundup

Astros hit 4 HRs, make winner of Greinke in debut

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Zack Greinke labored through six innings but wound up with a win in his Astros debut as Houston hit four home runs Tuesday night to beat the Colorado Rockies 11-6.

Playing in front of a season-high crowd of 43,243, the AL West leaders won their fifth straight. Yuli Gurriel hit two homers, Yordan Alvarez added a two-run drive and Carlos Correa homered and drove in three runs.

Greinke (11-4), a six-time All-Star who was traded from Arizona on Wednesday, yielded seven hits and five runs with two walks and two strikeouts. He left with the game tied at 5, tagged by Raimel Tapia’s three-run homer in the sixth.

But Houston scored two runs in the bottom of the inning, highlighted by Correa’s home run, to give Greinke his first win since July 5.

The AL West leaders got Greinke for four prospects in a startling trade just minutes

before the deadline to complete deals. The 35-year-old righty added another top-level starter to an imposing rotation led by All-Stars Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole.

Colorado starter German Marquez gave up eight hits and five runs in five innings.

Yankees 9, Orioles 4: Visiting New York continued its home run binge against Baltimore, hitting six more and getting three RBIs from Austin Romine in its 14th consecutive win at Camden Yards.

White Sox 5-6, Tigers 3-10: Miguel Cabrera had three hits and scored twice to help host Detroit win the second game and split a doubleheader with Chicago.

In the first game, Jose Abreu homered and drove in three runs and Dylan Cease pitched five solid innings to lift Chicago.

Royals 6, Red Sox 2: Jorge Soler hit a pair of long two-run homers over the Green Monster, Jakob Junis pitched six effective innings and visiting

Kansas City snapped a seven-game losing streak.

Brewers 4, Pirates 3: Yasmani Grandal had two doubles and an RBI and visiting Milwaukee, without a resting Christian Yelich, beat Pittsburgh for its second straight win.

Padres 9, Mariners 4: Dinelson Lamet (1-2) took a no-hit bid into the seventh inning for the only major league team that’s never pitched one, leading visiting San Diego over Seattle.

Athletics 11, Cubs 4: Lefty Jon Lester (9-8) was tagged for a career high-tying 11 runs in only four innings, with Dustin Garneau and Stephen Piscotty hitting three-run homers that led visiting Oakland over Chicago.

Rays 7, Blue Jays 6 (10): Kevin Kiermaier scored the winning run on a wild pitch with two outs in the bottom of the 10th inning as host Tampa Bay rallied from six runs back to beat Toronto.

Reds 8, Angels 4: Tuck-

er Barnhart hit two of host Cincinnati’s five home runs, Aristides Aquino included one among his three hits and came up with a clutch catch, helping complete a two-game sweep of Los Angeles.

Braves 12, Twins 7: Ronald Acuna Jr. and Freddie Freeman hit first-pitch homers off ace Jose Berrios (10-6) and visiting Atlanta routed Minnesota.

Nationals 5, Giants 3: Kurt Suzuki hit a two-run homer and RBI single during a three-hit night, Trea Turner added a solo drive to help back Anibal Sanchez (7-6), and visiting Washington beat San Francisco.

Diamondbacks 8, Phillies 4: Eduardo Escobar and Alex Avila homered and drove in three runs, and host Arizona rallied to beat Philadelphia.

Dodgers 3, Cardinals 1: Clayton Kershaw (11-2) struck out nine in seven strong innings, Justin Turner had two hits and drove in the game-winning run and host Los Angeles beat St. Louis for its seventh win in eight games.