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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US adds 1.8 million jobs in July amid virus

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States added 1.8 million jobs in July, a pullback from the gains of May and June and evidence that the resurgent coronavirus is weakening hiring and the economic rebound.

Many employers have been reluctant or unable to hire, with about two-thirds of the nation having paused or reversed reopening plans early last month. Even counting the hiring of the past three months, the economy has recovered only about 42% of the 22 million jobs it lost to the pandemic-induced recession, according to the Labor Department's jobs report released Friday.

The unemployment rate fell last month from 11.1% to 10.2%, though that still exceeds the highest rate during the 2008-09 Great Recession.

The acceleration of the viral outbreak that began in late June more than doubled the daily U.S. confirmed case count by mid-July. The rate of new reported cases has since declined. But the outbreaks have

led many states and cities to close bars and other businesses for a second time and have dampened confidence, causing many consumers to limit their shopping, traveling, eating out and gathering in crowds.

July's job gain was much lower than June's 4.8 million and May's 2.7 million jobs added, both of which were revised slightly.

Hiring was weaker in a range of industries last month. Manufacturing added just 26,000 jobs, less than one-tenth its June gain. Restaurants, bars, hotels and entertainment venues gained 592,000, just one-quarter of the June increase. Retailers added 258,000 jobs, down from more than 800,000 in June.

The economy is struggling to emerge from the devastating recession that caused it to shrink at a nearly 33% annual rate in the April-June quarter, the worst quarterly fall on record. Employers slashed their work forces, consumers cut spending and corporations pulled back on investment and expansion.

The economy has since started to grow

again, and many economists have forecast a solid rebound in the July-September quarter, though not nearly enough to offset the second quarter's dizzying fall.

Friday's report showed that 16.3 million people were unemployed in July — nearly triple the 5.9 million who were out of work before the pandemic. For people eligible for state unemployment aid, weekly checks average \$375, after a supplemental \$600-a-week federal benefit expired last week.

The loss of the \$600 check has shrunk benefits for America's unemployed by one-half to three-quarters, causing hardship for many. Analysts say the federal aid provided vital fuel for consumer spending and the overall economy, which depends on such spending. Its expiration could cause a wave of evictions as up to 23 million Americans struggle to pay their rent and mortgage payments.

Congressional Democratic leaders and the White House have been negotiating an extension of the unemployment aid. But progress has been limited.

At Fort Hood, Army secretary pledges changes

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

FORT HOOD, Texas — Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy said Thursday that his time spent with members of the Fort Hood community during the week will help determine the changes necessary throughout the service to ensure the recent killings and allegations of sexual harassment at the base do not continue.

McCarthy said the central Texas base has some of the highest numbers of sexual assault, harassment and killings "for our entire formation in the U.S. Army," though he rejected calls from critics to shut down Fort Hood, citing the "amazing contributions of men and women" there. Instead, he plans to investigate to determine what is causing the problems and make

changes.

"We are sitting down with a group of investigators to understand the root causes associated with the violence, the felonies and violent acts, but better understand why this is happening at this installation," McCarthy said during a news conference at the base's III Corps Headquarters. "The numbers are high here."

He also offered reforms related to missing person policies and to consider implementation of suggestions that could come from a number of ongoing investigations triggered by the disappearance and death of Spc. Vanessa Guillen at the base.

"Anger and frustration in a case like Vanessa's is necessary. I'm angry, frustrated and disappointed. We're heartbro-

ken," McCarthy said. "We rely on these units to protect our way of life. We're going to do everything that we can to prevent these types of things from happening, to learn from this and to move on. But we will do everything we can to protect her legacy by making enduring changes."

Since March, five soldiers assigned to the base have been killed. Four of those occurred off base, but Guillen was killed during the workday in an arms room by fellow soldier Spc. Aaron Robinson, who later killed himself.

Guillen's family has said she faced sexual harassment within her unit, triggering a social media campaign of veterans and service members sharing their own stories of sexual harassment and assault. Many

of the hundreds of veterans to speak out mentioned Fort Hood and said the system designed to protect and prosecute perpetrators failed them.

McCarthy said the Army is continuing to investigate any harassment Guillen experienced, though it's clear that her death has "ignited" questions about the program, as well as the challenges faced by soldiers who are a minority in the ranks either by race or gender.

McCarthy said he attended nine listening sessions during his two-day trip to Fort Hood, meeting with soldiers of various ranks as well as community and civic leaders from the surrounding cities, including area mayors, police departments, and organizations for the advancement of minority populations.

Man charged in Fort Hood soldier's death

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

FORT HOOD, Texas — A man was charged with murder in the death of a Fort Hood soldier whose body was found miles from his burning vehicle, police said Thursday.

Pfc. Brandon Scott Rosecrans, 27, was found unresponsive with a gunshot wound May 18 at about 10:17 a.m. in Harker Heights, a small town near Fort Hood, according to the Harker Heights Police Department. Investigators determined Brandon Michael Olivares, 28, was

in the vehicle with Rosecrans that morning when he shot the soldier and left him “in an area adjacent to the roadway,” police reported.

Minutes after police were called about Rosecrans’ body being found in the residential area, fire officials were notified of a burning vehicle on a residential street about 4 miles from the site where Rosecrans was found. The vehicle, a Jeep Renegade, belonged to Rosecrans, police said.

Officials issued an arrest warrant Wednesday for Oliva-

res, who is a Killeen resident. He was already in custody of the Bell County Sheriff’s Department on unrelated charges, according to police. Olivares was arraigned Wednesday and his bond set at \$1 million. The jail log listed Olivares as charged with murder and a charge from June of being a felon in possession of a firearm.

Olivares is not an active-duty or former soldier, according to information provided to Fort Hood Public Affairs from Army Human Resources Command.

Aside from Rosecrans, four Fort Hood soldiers have been

killed this year and three of the cases remain unsolved. Spc. Shelby Jones was killed March 1, Spc. Freddy Delacruz was killed March 14 in a triple homicide and the remains of Pvt. Gregory Wedel-Morales were found June 19 in a field.

Each of those deaths occurred in Killeen and remain under investigation by the city’s police department.

Spc. Vanessa Guillen was killed during the workday at Fort Hood by fellow soldier Spc. Aaron Robinson, who later killed himself.

Afghan council meets on release of prisoners

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — A traditional council met Friday in Kabul to decide whether to release a final 400 Taliban prisoners, the last hurdle to negotiations between Afghanistan’s political leadership and the Taliban under a peace deal the insurgents signed with the United States earlier this year.

The meeting of the council of elders, known as Loya Jirga, was initially expected to last three days but could end as early as Saturday.

The Kabul-Taliban negotiations are seen as a critical step toward lasting peace in Afghanistan and a road map to what the country might look like after decades of war, with the Taliban joining the political

mainstream.

The Taliban rejected Friday’s gathering in Kabul, claiming it had no legal status. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued a statement late Thursday saying the 400 prisoners had to be released if peace talks with the Taliban were to move forward.

If the council agrees to free the 400 Taliban, talks between

Kabul and the Taliban could begin as early as Monday.

A survey circulated at the Loya Jirga on Friday put the choice bluntly: decide to free the Taliban prisoners and talks could begin on Monday, or refuse and the war would continue.

If the Taliban are freed, direct talks could be followed by a lasting cease-fire.

Beirut death toll rises as search continues in port

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Rescue teams were still searching the rubble of Beirut’s port for bodies on Friday, nearly three days after a massive explosion sent a wave of destruction through Lebanon’s capital, killing nearly 150 people and wounding thousands.

The blast was apparently caused by the ignition of 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate, a chemical used for explosives and fertilizer, that had been stored at the port since it was confiscated from an impounded cargo ship in 2013.

The government has launched

an investigation as it has come under mounting criticism, with many Lebanese blaming the catastrophe on negligence and corruption.

A team of 55 French rescuers that began work Thursday has found four bodies, according to Col. Tissier Vincent, the head of the mission. Lebanese firefighters are also working at the demolished port, where bulldozers and excavators were churning through the rubble. Dozens of people are still missing.

Some 300,000 people — more than 12% of Beirut’s population — are unable to return to their homes because of the explo-

sion, which blew out doors and windows across the city and left many buildings uninhabitable. Officials have estimated losses at \$10 billion to \$15 billion.

Damaged hospitals, already strained by the coronavirus pandemic, are still struggling to deal with the wounded.

The investigation is focusing on port and customs officials, with 16 employees detained and others questioned. But many Lebanese say it points to much greater rot that permeates the political system and extends to the country’s top leadership.

Even before the blast, the country was mired in a severe economic crisis that was also

widely blamed on the political class. That will make the task of rebuilding after the blast even more daunting.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who paid a visit to the site Thursday, said France would lead international efforts to provide aid but would not give “blank checks to a system that no longer has the trust of its people.” France, which has close ties to its former colony, has also sent a team of 22 investigators to help probe the blast.

The U.N. human rights office meanwhile called for an independent investigation, insisting “victims’ calls for accountability must be heard.”

India hits 2M cases; volunteers go on strike

Associated Press

NEW DELHI — As India hit another grim milestone in the coronavirus pandemic on Friday, crossing 2 million cases and more than 41,000 deaths, community health volunteers went on strike complaining they were ill-equipped to respond to the wave of infection in rural areas.

Even as India has maintained comparatively low mortality rates, the disease trajectory varies widely across the country with the burden shifting from cities with relatively robust health systems to rural areas, where resources are scarce or nonexistent.

The Health Ministry reported 62,538 cases in the past 24 hours, raising the nation's total to 2,027,074. Also, 886 people died, for a total of 41,585.

The ministry said that recoveries were also growing. India has the third-highest caseload in the world after the United States and Brazil. It has the fifth-most deaths but its fatality rate of about 2% is far lower than the top two hardest-hit countries. The rate in the U.S. is 3.3%, and in Brazil 3.4%, Johns Hopkins University figures showed.

The caseload in the world's second-most populous country has quickly expanded since the government began lifting a monthslong lockdown hoping to jump-start a moribund economy.

India is projecting negative economic growth in 2020.

Life cautiously returned to the streets of the capital of New Delhi and financial hub Mumbai, which appear to have passed their peaks.

But authorities elsewhere in India were reimposing lockdowns after sharp spikes in cases.

Trump bans business with Chinese owners of TikTok

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President Donald Trump has ordered a sweeping but vague ban on dealings with the Chinese owners of popular social media apps TikTok and WeChat on security grounds, a move China's government criticized as "political manipulation."

The twin executive orders Thursday — one for each app — add to growing U.S.-Chinese conflict over technology and security. They take effect in 45 days and could bar the apps from the Apple and Google app stores, effectively removing them from U.S. distribution.

China's foreign ministry said it opposed the move but gave no indication whether Beijing might retaliate.

Earlier, Trump threatened a deadline of Sept. 15 to "close down" TikTok in the United

States unless Microsoft Corp. or another company acquires it.

TikTok, owned by Beijing-headquartered ByteDance Ltd., is popular for its short, catchy videos. The company says it has 100 million users in the United States and hundreds of millions worldwide.

The Trump administration has expressed concern Chinese social media services could provide American users' personal information to Chinese authorities, though it has given no evidence TikTok did that.

Instead, officials point to the Communist Party's ability to compel cooperation from Chinese companies. U.S. regulators cited similar security concerns last year when the Chinese owner of Grindr was ordered to sell the dating app.

In a statement, TikTok expressed shock at the order and complained it violates U.S. law.

The company said it doesn't store American user data in China and never has given it to Beijing or censored content at the government's request.

TikTok said it spent nearly a year trying to reach a "constructive solution" but the Trump administration "paid no attention to facts" and tried improperly to insert itself into business negotiations. TikTok said it would "pursue all remedies" available to ensure the company and its users are "are treated fairly."

Tencent and Microsoft declined to comment.

On Friday, shares of WeChat's owner, Tencent Holding Ltd., declined 5% in trading in Hong Kong. Tencent, Asia's most valuable tech company with a market capitalization of \$650 million, makes most of its money from online games and entertainment in China.

Relief package talks on verge of collapse

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Washington talks on vital COVID-19 rescue money are teetering on the brink of collapse after a marathon meeting in the Capitol generated lots of recriminations but little progress on the top issues confronting negotiators.

"There's a handful of very big issues that we are still very far apart" on, said Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. He talked of impasses on aid to states and local governments and renewing supplemental unemployment benefits in the Thursday night meetings.

Both sides said the future of the talks is uncertain. No meeting was scheduled for Friday, an informal deadline to reach the broad outlines of an agreement.

A breakdown in the talks would put at risk more than \$100 billion to help reopen schools, a fresh round of \$1,200 direct payments to most people and hundreds of billions of dollars for state and local governments to help them avoid furloughing workers and cutting services as tax revenues shrivel.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-

N.Y., emerged from Thursday's meeting to give a pessimistic update about the chances for an agreement.

"We're very far apart. It's most unfortunate," Pelosi said.

Both sides have adopted a hard line in the talks, though the Trump team is more open in disclosing a handful of its proposed compromises. Republicans were late to agree to the talks and have become frustrated by the inflexible tactics of Pelosi and Schumer, who have been exuding confidence in a political and legislative landscape that appeared tilted in their favor.

The Democratic pair say the federal coronavirus aid package needs to be huge to meet the moment: a surge in cases and deaths, double-digit joblessness and the threat of poverty for millions of the newly unemployed.

Senate Republicans have been split, with roughly half of McConnell's rank and file opposed to another rescue bill at all. Four prior coronavirus response bills totaling almost \$3 trillion have passed on bipartisan votes despite intense wrangling, but conservatives recoiled at the prospect of another Pelosi-brokered agreement with a whopping deficit-financed cost.

Families take DIY tests to aid virus study

Associated Press

In a comfy suburb just outside Nashville, Tenn., a young family swabs their noses twice a month in a DIY study seeking answers to some of the most vexing questions about the coronavirus.

How many U.S. children and teens are infected? How many kids who are infected show no symptoms? How likely are they to spread it to other kids and adults?

"The bottom line is we just don't know yet the degree to which children can transmit the virus," said Dr. Tina Hartert of Vanderbilt University, who is leading the government-funded study.

Evidence from the U.S., China and Europe shows children are less likely to become infected with the virus than adults and also less likely to become seriously ill when they do get sick. There is also data suggesting that young children don't spread the virus very often but that kids aged 10 and up may spread it just as easily as adults. The new study aims to find more solid proof.

Some 2,000 families in 11 U.S. cities are enrolled in the DIY experiment, pulled from participants in previous government research. In all, that's 6,000 people. They have no in-person contact with researchers. Testing supplies are mailed to their homes.

They collect their own nasal swabs for COVID-19 tests, and less often blood and stool samples. The specimens are mailed to the study organizers. Participants get text messages asking about symptoms and reminding them to test and they fill out questionnaires.

The study could help determine the safety of in-class education during the pandemic. But results aren't expected before year's end.

Arizona

PHOENIX — Arizona's top health official and the state's education chief laid out a series of guidelines Thursday

that public schools were urged to use when deciding whether coronavirus infection rates are low enough to safely reopen for full in-person learning.

"We think it is going to be several weeks before any county meets those benchmarks, but we do see it trending down," said Dr. Cara Christ, who leads the Arizona Health Services Department.

The scientific guidelines released by Christ's department lay out three key measurements of the virus' community effects.

The guidelines say schools can consider reopening for partial in-person learning once their county meets several criteria as measured over two weeks: fewer than 100 new cases per 100,000 people or a sustained drop in new cases; a rate of positive tests that is 7% or less; and fewer than 10% of hospital visits for COVID-like symptoms.

California

SACRAMENTO — Worried about the unpredictable coronavirus wreaking havoc on the November election, California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Thursday signed a law to let counties offer fewer in-person polling places in exchange for opening the sites earlier.

The change follows another law Newsom signed in June requiring counties to mail ballots to every active registered voter ahead of the Nov. 3 election. It's part of the state's strategy to keep people from gathering at polling places and risk further spread of the coronavirus that has killed nearly 9,900 Californians.

"This November will have the most unusual election, at least in my lifetime, but there will be an election," said state Sen. Tom Umberg, a Democrat from Santa Ana and the author of the bill.

While every active registered voter in California will get a ballot in the mail, some people must vote in person for various reasons, including lost or damaged mailed ballots, the need for language assistance or help

due to a disability, or because they want to register to vote on Election Day, which California law allows at polling places.

Georgia

ATLANTA — Five small-business owners are accused of fraudulently obtaining about \$4 million in federal funds created to help businesses amid the pandemic, and using them for personal expenses.

The scheme began when four of the business owners submitted or helped submit loan applications that sought nearly \$800,000 for each of their businesses under the Paycheck Protection Program, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia said in a news release Thursday.

Officials said the businesses reported having over five dozen employees. Meanwhile, none of them had filed payroll tax forms with the IRS last year or for the first quarter of this year, federal authorities said. Four of the companies also submitted fake bank statements with their loan applications, the release said.

Hawaii

HONOLULU — Hawaii Gov. David Ige said Thursday he would reinstate a requirement that people traveling between the islands quarantine themselves for 14 days while making an exception for people arriving on Oahu from the other counties as the number of COVID-19 cases in the state grows exponentially.

The interisland quarantine rule that ended June 16 will be partially reinstated on Tuesday, Ige said. People arriving on Oahu from the other islands won't need to quarantine, but travelers arriving in the other counties from other islands will.

Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell said he would close public parks, pools and campgrounds. The city and its suburbs on Oahu have had the bulk of the state's cases. State parks on Oahu will also be closed.

Ige and Caldwell said their objective was to crack down on large, uncontrolled gatherings.

Michigan

LANSING — Gov. Gretchen Whitmer on Thursday extended her mask requirement to include many children who attend day care and camps, saying the step is necessary to ensure that such facilities can remain open and safe during the coronavirus pandemic.

Previously, child care centers and camps were exempt from her order to wear a face covering inside enclosed public spaces and crowded outdoor places, though masks had been highly recommended at camps when small groups cross paths and cannot socially distance.

The new directive, which takes effect Monday, applies to all staff and children ages 2 and up on a school bus and those ages 4 and older in indoor hallways and common areas. Staff and children ages 12 and older must wear a mask in classrooms, cabins or similar indoor settings.

New Mexico

ALBUQUERQUE — New Mexico green chile distributors say health restrictions amid the pandemic are forcing them to sell chiles directly to the public.

KOB-TV in Albuquerque reported that distributors have no choice but to sell directly because many restaurants are operating differently during the pandemic.

Quality Foods, for example, will be buying chile directly from New Mexico farmers and selling it to the public right outside its Albuquerque facility.

"The way this is going, I don't see us using 50% of our usage of last year," said Louie Gonzales, owner of Quality Foods.

"We have them call in an order they drive up," said Nazario Sandoval, co-owner of Quality Foods. "We take it to their hatchback and their trunk, and we don't have contact with them."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Live ordnance is found in museum storeroom

NE NORFOLK — A bomb squad and military experts had to be called to a northeastern Nebraska museum after live military ordnance — including a World War II grenade and two artillery shells — were found in a museum storeroom, officials said.

The staff at the Elkhorn Valley Museum in Norfolk discovered the grenade, ammunition and ordnance on Wednesday, shut down the museum and called Norfolk police, the Norfolk Daily News reported.

Local officers were unable to determine if the vintage ordnance was live and called the Nebraska State Patrol bomb squad. The bomb squad determined that some of the items were live, and called the Nebraska Air National Guard explosive ordnance disposal team to help. Team members removed all of the live items.

Among the five live ordnance items found were a British “Mills Bomb” grenade from World War II, a Navy 37-millimeter steel artillery shell from World War I and a post-WWII 20-millimeter shell for an Oerlikon anti-aircraft gun, officials said.

A few of the artifacts were cleared by the military explosives team and will remain in the museum’s permanent collection.

Machine for guacamole explodes, killing 1

NY SCHENECTADY — A food processor being tested for manufacturing guacamole exploded, killing a 67-year-old man and injuring two others, authorities said.

Businessman Joseph Kapp

died at a local hospital after the explosion Wednesday morning at Innovative Test Solutions, an engineering firm and test laboratory.

Schenectady Fire Department Assistant Chief Don Mareno told the Times-Union of Albany that the machine was a “high-pressure vessel.” Authorities released few other details about the blast.

Two other people were sent to the hospital with less serious injuries, Mareno said.

Man who threatened professor sent to prison

MA BOSTON — A Rhode Island man who sent a series of threatening emails to a Massachusetts college professor who spoke in favor of abortion rights and was critical of President Donald Trump has been sentenced to nearly two years in prison, prosecutors say.

Matthew Haviland, 30, of North Kingstown, was sentenced Wednesday in federal court in Boston to 21 months in prison and three years of probation.

Haviland pleaded guilty last September to stalking and transmitting a threat in interstate commerce.

Man dies trying to rescue kids from river

CA REEDLEY — A man who tried to rescue three children from a rushing central California river has died, authorities said.

Emergency personnel responded Wednesday evening to reports of at least two victims in the Kings River near Reedley, according to the Fresno Bee.

Crews rescued an 8-year-old girl, Reedley police said. Two other children made it out of

the river safely on their own.

A 28-year-old man who jumped in to help the children was missing after disappearing under water, police said. He was found downstream about an hour later and rushed to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead. The man’s name was not immediately released.

The 8-year-old girl was hospitalized in critical condition.

Man dies after being struck by boat anchor

MO CAMDENTON — An Illinois man has died after being hit by a boat anchor on Lake of the Ozarks, authorities said.

Craig Gathmann, 55, of Manito, Ill., was operating a boat Wednesday afternoon with the anchor still in the water, the Missouri State Highway Patrol said. Once the anchor released, the tension in the rope caused it to catapult out of the water, hitting Gathmann, investigators said.

Gathmann was rushed to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead. Patrol records show the incident was the second boating death on the lake this year.

Vet warns of livestock illness hitting Midwest

TN NASHVILLE — Tennessee’s state veterinarian is advising livestock owners to look out for signs of a disease that has affected horses, cattle and other animals in several Midwest states.

State Veterinarian Samantha Beaty said in a news release that vesicular stomatitis virus, or VSV, has not yet entered Tennessee, but it has sickened livestock in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma.

Officials say VSV primarily

affects horses and cattle, but it can also sicken sheep, goats, pigs, llamas and alpacas. The disease is typically transmitted by biting insects and causes blister-like lesions on the skin.

Humans can contract VSV by coming into contact with lesions, saliva or nasal secretions from infected animals. In humans, the disease causes a flu-like illness with fever, muscle aches and headache, officials said.

Livestock owners should contact a veterinarian if they spot lesions on their animals. People bringing livestock into Tennessee should call the state veterinarian’s office for inspection requirements.

Urban coyotes likely mutilated other animals

CA SACRAMENTO — Animal control officers in northern California have determined that a growing population of urban coyotes is likely the culprit behind multiple discoveries of mutilated animal corpses.

Residents in Sacramento started reporting sightings of dead cats over the past few weeks, the Sacramento Bee reported.

The discoveries came years after headless goats, birds, cows, goats, fish and chickens were found in parks, remote areas and along the light-rail tracks, officials said. No one was ever previously arrested, but the corpses stopped showing up until recently.

Chief Animal Control Officer Jace Huggins has estimated at least 40 coyotes are living within city limits and using parks, levees and river corridors to move around and mostly go unnoticed.

From wire reports

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Marlins staging unexpected turnaround

Associated Press

Miami Marlins manager Don Mattingly was talking about this week's doubleheader sweep at Baltimore that involved a parade of relievers, including several newcomers rescued from unemployment, and after naming three of them he drew a blank.

"I've got to remember who all we used," Mattingly said. "Who else pitched today? I don't know."

For the Marlins, this season has been a bit of a blur. It was halted for eight days because of a coronavirus outbreak that sidelined more than half the team, and even now, five games into the resumption of play, there's cause for eye-rubbing.

The Marlins are in first place in August, a first for the franchise.

In fact, at 6-1 they have the best record in baseball, staging a one-year turnaround not seen since the 1899 St. Louis Perfectos.

Coming off a 57-105 season, the Marlins are the first team to win at least six of its first seven games after losing 105 or more the previous year since the Perfectos began 7-0 in 1899, according to @StatsbySTATS.

Following a decade of sub-.500 seasons, the Marlins reported for spring training with something close to a swagger in Year 3 of their rebuilding project under CEO Derek Jeter. They still sounded confident

even after the virus sidelined three-fifths of their rotation, eight relievers and six other players.

"We're ready to win games," rookie outfielder Monte Harrison said. "A lot of people don't understand that we've got some people here that can play. Whatever they want to call us — the bottom feeders or whatever — there's a rude awakening that is going to be happening."

Harrison spoke boldly even though he has one career hit, a scratch single Thursday in the Marlins' 8-7 win at Baltimore. That completed Miami's first four-game series sweep in more than four years.

After only three games, the Marlins became stranded for a week in Philadelphia. The infected players were bused back to Miami, while the holdovers were confined to their hotel rooms and searched for ways to stay sane and in shape.

"I would line up the mattress and set up the chairs as hitters," closer Brandon Kintzler said, "and I would throw for about half an hour every day."

Meanwhile, management scrambled for reinforcements, and came up with a mix of veteran castoffs and minor leaguers. Miami called up such farmhands as 30-year-old infielder Eddy Alvarez, a former Olympic silver medalist in speedskating.

Alvarez, who joined the Marlins' system last year, started both games of Wednesday's doubleheader. He's 0-for-5 so far as a big leaguer, but he's also undefeated and said the team's record is no fluke.

"The public doesn't understand our culture here in the Marlins organization, a culture I've been extremely blessed to be a part of," Alvarez said. "I didn't quite understand what it is to have a winning culture. Derek Jeter takes the lead role. That's the captain, and we can feel that."

There's a curious cohesion and chemistry to the patchwork team, including the infected players, who were represented in absentia in Baltimore with cutout images propped in seats near the dugout.

Among the quarantined players back in Miami cheering the club on was shortstop Miguel Rojas, who fired off more than a dozen tweets during the latest win.

"I'm sweating," he wrote, "and I don't have fever."

On the subject of pennant fever, it should be noted that four of the Marlins' six wins have come against the Orioles, who lost 108 games themselves last year. It should also be noted that the 1899 Perfectos faded after their fast start to a fifth-place finish in the National League.

The Marlins going from 105 losses to the playoffs in one season despite a wave of virus infection would be crazy, right?

But it would also be so 2020.

MLB roundup

Oakland stays hot ahead of Houston series

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — The Oakland Athletics are on a roll with the rival Houston Astros coming to town at last.

Matt Olson homered to back Mike Fiers' first win of the season and the A's beat the Texas Rangers 6-4 on Thursday for their sixth straight victory and a series sweep.

Khris Davis added a two-run single, Mark Canha had an RBI single and Stephen Piscotty a sacrifice fly as the balanced, first-place A's won again with Houston on its way.

"We're getting better every day, guys are starting to click and get the little kinks out," Fiers said. "We're not 100% but we're still winning. It's great news for us."

Anderson Tejeda hit a two-run homer in his major league debut, chasing Fiers (1-0) in the seventh inning.

Fiers won't line up against his former team after he was the whistleblower in the Astros' sign-stealing scandal when he revealed the scam to The Athletic in November.

Marlins 8, Orioles 7: Jonathan Villar hit a first-pitch leadoff homer to spark a robust offensive performance by Miami, which beat host Baltimore on Thursday night to complete a startling four-game sweep and make Don Mattingly the winningest manager in franchise history.

Angels 6, Mariners 1: Shohei Ohtani homered in his first plate appearance since being shut down as a pitcher, Dylan

Bundy struck out 10 in the third complete game of his career and Los Angeles beat Seattle.

Brewers 8, White Sox 3: Christian Yelich hit his first career inside-the-park homer and walked four times, helping visiting Milwaukee to the victory.

Braves 4, Blue Jays 3: At Atlanta, Nick Markakis capped his first start of the season with a game-ending home run in the ninth inning.

Pirates 6, Twins 5: Kevin Newman's two-run pinch-single with one out in the ninth inning lifted host Pittsburgh over Minnesota.

Phillies 5, Yankees 4: J.T. Realmuto hit a three-run homer, Hector Neris struck out Aaron Judge in a big spot and Philadelphia beat visiting New York.

Indians 13, Reds 0: Jose Ramirez hit a solo homer from the left side of the plate against Luis Castillo (0-2) in the first inning and connected again during host Cleveland's 10-run seventh, belting a two-run drive off left-hander Cody Reed.

Diamondbacks 5, Astros 4: Kole Calhoun lined a two-run single in the ninth inning and host Arizona rallied to beat Houston and win its first series of the season.

Rockies 6, Giants 4: Daniel Murphy hit a two-run, pinch-homer during a five-run seventh inning to lead Colorado over visiting San Francisco.

Royals 13, Cubs 2: Whit Merrifield, Maikel Franco and Jorge Soler homered, and host Kansas City stopped a six-game slide.

Day, Todd lead after Day 1 of PGA Open

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — By now, it is becoming all too familiar.

The starter stepped to the microphone and kept to the PGA Championship tradition afforded its champions. One player gets the longest introduction. “Now on the tee, the 1999, 2000, 2006 and 2007 PGA Champion ... Tiger Woods.”

And then silence.

It's the eerie product of golf amid a pandemic, and even after two months of no spectators, the quiet can be jarring.

Also familiar — Brooks Koepka bringing his best to the majors.

Jason Day and Brendon Todd wound up in a share of the lead Thursday after an opening round packed with action, just not cheers. Each posted a 5-under 65 at Harding Park, where fog gave way to the sun and the wind eased just enough to make the public course accessible to reasonable scoring.

The one constant appears to be Koepka.

Just two weeks after he missed a cut and was so frustrated he said he heaved a club 70 yards during practice, he powered his way to six birdies for a 66 that left him in a large group one shot behind.

“It's only 18 holes right now,” Koepka said. “I feel good. I feel confident. I'm excited for the next three days. I think I can definitely play a lot better. Just need to tidy a few things up, and we'll be there come Sunday on the back nine.”

Day, trying to emerge from a slump that has kept him from winning since 2018 and contending in majors since 2016, hit an approach to 6 feet for birdie on No. 9, the second-toughest hole on the course at 518 yards for a par 4 at sea level.

Todd's round was equally impressive. Playing in the afternoon, as the wind strengthened, Todd made seven birdies

and finished with a 10-foot par putt.

Koepka, the two-time defending champion, was presented with the opportunity this week to become only the seventh player in the 160-year history of major championship golf to win the same major three years in a row. It was last done 64 years ago.

He's still a little annoyed that he missed a similar chance last year down the Pacific coast at Pebble Beach, when he finished runner-up in his bid for a third consecutive U.S. Open.

Koepka hasn't won in more than a year. His left knee has been bothering him since last August. No matter. After a slow start, he quickly moved his way up the leaderboard and stayed there with a series of key putts for par — and one 12-footer for bogey — that gave him an ideal start to this major.

He was at 66 with eight other players, a list that included former major winners Justin Rose, Martin Kaymer and Zach Johnson, rising star Xander Schauffele and tour rookie Scottie Scheffler.

Woods ran off three birdies in a four-hole stretch toward the end of his round that offset a few mistakes. He opened with a 68, a solid start for a 15-time major champion who has played one tournament in the past six months.

Woods put a new putter into play — this one is a little longer, which he says helps him practice longer without straining his surgically repaired back — and it came in handy. He made a 30-foot birdie early. He was most pleased with a 20-foot par putt on No. 18 as he made the turn. And he was thrilled with the weather.

“I thought anything today in the red was going to be good,” Woods said.

In this case, there was a lot of good to go around. Just under one-third of the field — 47 players — broke par.

Texas Tech fires coach following scathing report

Associated Press

LUBBOCK, Texas — Texas Tech fired women's basketball coach Marlene Stollings on Thursday, a day after a scathing newspaper report alleging a culture of abuse in her program.

Athletic director Kirby Hocutt announced the firing in a one-sentence statement while adding that he planned to address the decision Friday.

Players made claims of abuse over the past two years in season-ending exit interviews that were obtained through an open records request by The Intercollegiate, an investigative media outlet for college sports. The details were published by USA Today.

Players dreaded a heart monitoring system they said was misused in punitive ways, had to endure demeaning and threatening comments and

were subject to sexually suggestive behavior from a strength coach who has since resigned, according to the report.

Players said the coaching staff demanded that they maintain a heart rate of at least 90% of capacity during games and that they faced loss of playing time or more conditioning work if they didn't. A pediatric sports medicine director said maintaining a heart rate that high would be “very difficult” to do.

Over two years, 12 of 21 players left the program, including seven recruited under Stollings, according to the report. She defended her program in a statement to the newspaper.

Hocutt initially defended the coach as well, saying he was confident steps were being taken to improve communication in the program following a review of the program by a four-person committee.

66 NFL players opt out of season

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A total of 66 players have opted out of the 2020 NFL season due to the coronavirus pandemic, nearly half of them linemen.

Twenty offensive linemen and 11 defensive linemen opted out before Thursday's deadline. Players with a medical opt-out will receive a \$350,000 stipend, while those voluntarily opting out receive \$150,000 as an advance against future salaries.

No team has come close to New England in losing players for the upcoming season, which begins Sept. 10 with the Houston Texans visiting the Super

Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs. The Patriots, already minus several stars who left in free agency — including, of course, Tom Brady to Tampa Bay — had eight players opt out: running back Brandon Bolden, offensive tackle Marcus Cannon, safety Patrick Chung, linebacker Dont'a Hightower, tight end Matt LaCosse, wide receiver Marqise Lee, offensive lineman Najee Toran and fullback Dan Vitale. Hightower, Cannon and Chung were key contributors in recent seasons.

Only three teams had no one opting out: the Steelers, Falcons and Chargers.

NBA roundup

Milwaukee clinches top seed in East

Associated Press

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — Giannis Antetokounmpo and Khris Middleton scored 33 points each, and the Milwaukee Bucks overcame a huge early deficit to get a 130-116 win over the Miami Heat on Thursday to clinch the top seed in the Eastern Conference.

The Heat led by as many as 23 points in a first half where the team piled up 73 points despite playing without Jimmy Butler and Goran Dragic.

Miami cooled off after the break and the Bucks took the lead in the third quarter but were down by 6 to start the fourth.

Antetokounmpo sat out about five minutes of the fourth quarter after collecting his fifth foul with 11 minutes to go. Milwaukee trailed by 1 with about five minutes remaining before using a 20-0 run, with three dunks from Antetokounmpo, to make it 130-111 with less than a minute to go and cruise to the victory.

Duncan Robinson had 21 points for Miami, which lost to Milwaukee for the first time this season after winning the

first two meetings.

Rockets 113, Lakers 97: James Harden had 39 points and 12 assists to lead Houston over the Los Angeles Lakers, who were playing without LeBron James.

The Lakers, who clinched the top seed in the Western Conference on Monday, didn't have James because of a sore right groin.

The Rockets were also short-handed, missing Russell Westbrook because of a bruised right quadriceps. But the combination of Harden's big game and Houston's long-range shooting were enough to take care of the Lakers. The Rockets made 21 of 57 threes while Los Angeles hit just 2 of 19.

Suns 114, Pacers 99: Deandre Ayton had 23 points and 10 rebounds, and Phoenix continued its improbable run in the NBA bubble, beating Indiana for its fourth straight victory.

Malcolm Brogdon had 25 points, six assists and six rebounds to lead the Pacers, who fell to 3-1 in Orlando.

The victory pulls the Suns out of the basement in the Western Conference among the teams

in Orlando, passing Zion Williamson and the Pelicans. New Orleans lost to the Kings 140-125 earlier in the day.

Kings 140, Pelicans 125: Bogdan Bogdanovic scored a career-high 35 points to help Sacramento beat New Orleans.

Zion Williamson and Brandon Ingram each scored 24 points for the Pelicans. Williamson made his first eight shots and ended up making 10 of 12 overall in just under 22 minutes.

Both teams are chasing a spot in the Western Conference playoffs. The Kings pulled even with the Pelicans in the standings and now are 2½ games behind eighth-place Memphis with four games remaining. A team needs to be in ninth place and within four games of the eighth-place team to force a playoff.

Clippers 126, Mavericks 111: Kawhi Leonard scored 29 points to help the Los Angeles Clippers beat Dallas in a possible playoff preview.

Paul George scored 24 points and Ivica Zubac added 21 points on 10-for-10 shooting and 15 rebounds for the Clippers, who

strengthened their hold on the No. 2 spot in the Western Conference standings.

Kristaps Porzingis scored 30 points and Luka Doncic added 29 for Dallas, which fell to 1-3 in the restart. Dallas likely will finish as the No. 7 seed, making a first-round matchup with the Clippers a strong possibility.

Trail Blazers 125, Nuggets 115: Damian Lillard tied his franchise record with 11 three-pointers and scored 45 points, and Portland moved closer to the No. 8 spot in the Western Conference by beating Denver.

Lillard was 11-for-18 from three-point range, plus had 12 assists for Portland. The Blazers (32-38) closed to within a half-game of Memphis in the race for eighth in the West, where a play-in series for the last playoff berth now seems almost certain.

Michael Porter Jr. scored 27 points and grabbed 12 rebounds for Denver (45-24), which remained in the West's No. 3 spot. The Nuggets played most of the fourth quarter with reserves on the floor, limiting Nikola Jokic to 24 minutes.

NHL roundup

Golden Knights close in on No. 1 in West

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Mark Stone scored the go-ahead goal on a deflection with under 7 minutes left, and the Vegas Golden Knights took a big step toward clinching the top seed in the Western Conference by beating the St. Louis Blues 6-4 in round-robin play Thursday night.

Vegas would be the West's No. 1 seed with a win against Colorado on Saturday. The team that went to the 2018 Stanley Cup Final and was eliminated after a questionable call in Game 7 of its first-round series against San Jose last year looks capable of winning it all.

"We came into Edmonton wanting to play our best hockey, whether that got us three wins or no wins," Stone said. "So long as we're playing well, we feel confident against anyone."

Despite leading the conference when the NHL season was shut down in March, defending champion St. Louis can finish no higher than third and needs to beat Dallas on Sunday to avoid the No. 4 seed.

Flames 4, Jets 0: At Edmonton, Sean Monahan and Sam Bennett each had a goal and an assist as Calgary beat Winnipeg in Game 4 to win their qualifying round series.

Blue Jackets 4, Maple Leafs 3 (OT): At

Toronto, Pierre-Luc Dubois got his third goal of the game 18:24 into overtime, finishing Columbus' comeback from three goals down to take a 2-1 lead in the playoff qualifying series.

Canucks 3, Wild 0: At Edmonton, Brock Boeser and Elias Pettersson each had a power-play goal and an assist, Jacob Markstrom made 27 saves for his first postseason shutout, and Vancouver took a 2-1 lead in the best-of-five qualifier series.

Flyers 3, Capitals 1: At Toronto, Scott Laughton had two goals and an assist to lead Philadelphia over Washington in round-robin play.