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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Branches have differing values for promotions

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

Marines tend to value discipline over risk-taking for their one-star candidates, while the Navy prizes technical expertise and relations with peers hold greater sway in the Army, a Defense Department-commissioned report found.

General and flag officers in each service all had some things in common — similar backgrounds and experiences, stellar evaluations and successful command tours, the Rand Corp. study titled “Raise the Flag” found.

But each of the armed services trains and promotes its top officers differently by rewarding different qualities, the study released Monday said.

In the Army, where generals

tend to come from infantry and armor branches, the career path tends to be “tactically focused, command-centric, doctrine based and, especially for O-7 promotion decisions, influenced by an officer’s reputation among Army senior leaders.”

That encourages promotion of an officer that will be “an excellent planner of military operations but might not be highly adaptable and creative, particularly when facing challenges for which doctrine does not exist,” the study said.

They might also be less likely to share innovative or controversial ideas to avoid poor performance evaluations, the report found.

The Marine career track is “highly prescriptive and performance-based, and common experiences serve to reinforce

the Marine Corps’ egalitarian culture and create a highly cohesive Marine Corps (general officer) corps,” the study said. Its archetypical general might “equate effective leadership with understanding how to also be a good, disciplined follower — of rules, and of other leaders,” “value discipline over risk-taking” and “be averse to questioning assumptions underlying existing processes, strategies and orders.”

The Navy’s career development processes tend to emphasize self-reliance, technical expertise and “Darwinian” competition, the study said.

As a result, its flag officers are often “less risk-averse in operational decisions” than in other services, without being careless — though that may be “more true” of archetypes with surface warfare and undersea

backgrounds, the study said.

Admirals are more likely to “offer fresh perspective and strategic advice” but also “prioritize maintaining good relations,” which might mean hesitancy to provide contrarian advice.

The Air Force identifies talent early and emphasizes early promotions. It also puts more importance on education and joint experience than other services, the study said.

The archetype is a pilot and most frequently a fighter pilot, the Rand report found. They might be less comfortable with “outside-the-box” ideas and in leadership positions “that require decisions without the benefit of clear order and procedure.” They’re also more likely to rely less on hierarchy in planning and operations, Rand said.

US says Iran briefly seized oil tanker near Strait of Hormuz

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The Iranian navy boarded and briefly seized a Liberian-flagged oil tanker near the strategic Strait of Hormuz amid heightened tensions between Tehran and the U.S., a U.S. military official said Thursday.

U.S. Central Command published a black-and-white video showing what appeared to be special forces fast-roping down from a helicopter onto the MT Wila, whose last position appeared to be off the eastern coast of the United Arab Emirates near the city of Khorfakkan.

The Iranian navy held the vessel for some five hours before releasing it Wednesday, said a U.S. military official who spoke to The Associated Press

on condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet made public.

The Wila made no distress calls before, during and after the seizure, the official said.

The Iranian helicopter involved appeared to be a Sikorsky SH-3 Sea King, which only Iran’s navy operates.

The Iranian navy also handles all operations in the Gulf of Oman on the eastern side of the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20% of all oil traded passes. Two other Iranian naval vessels took part in the seizure, CENTCOM said.

U.S. military officials did not offer any reason for Iran seizing the vessel. Iranian state media and officials did not acknowledge the seizure or offer a reason for it.

Officials in the UAE, a U.S.-

allied federation of seven sheikhdoms on the Arabian Peninsula, did not respond to a request for comment.

The Wila’s registered owner is a Liberian firm called Bandit Shipping Co., managed by Greek firm IMS SA, according to United Nations records. Bandit Shipping could not be reached, while IMS did not respond to requests for comment.

The Wila had been off Khor Al Zubair, Iraq, in early July before traveling to near Dubai and later Khorfakkan, where it’s been for around a month, according to data firm Refinitiv. It wasn’t immediately clear what cargo it carried.

Private maritime intelligence firm Dryad Global said it suspected two other ships had been harassed by Iran’s paramilitary Revolutionary Guard

in the Persian Gulf over the last week as well, based on the ships’ behavior.

As tensions between Iran and the U.S. heated up last year over America’s unilateral withdrawal from its 2015 nuclear deal, tankers plying the waters of the Mideast became targets, particularly near the strait, the Persian Gulf’s narrow mouth.

Suspected limpet mine attacks the U.S. blamed on Iran targeted several tankers.

Iran denied being involved, though it did seize several tankers.

In July, a U.S.-sought oil tanker was “hijacked” off the coast of the United Arab Emirates after allegedly smuggling Iranian crude oil. The vessel later ended up back in Iranian waters, suggesting Iran itself seized the vessel.

Trump said to mull replacing Esper after Nov.

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has privately said that he intends to replace Secretary of Defense Mark Esper after the November election, according to people familiar with internal discussions.

One person said Esper has told people close to him that he intends to leave regardless of the election's outcome, meaning he could exit the administration about two months before Trump does, if the president loses.

Trump has been frustrated that Esper, who became secretary in July 2019, hasn't done more to publicly defend him on key issues, including reports that Russia paid Taliban fighters "bounties" for the killing of U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Trump was also angered that Esper in June publicly opposed the idea of deploying active-duty military to contain nationwide protests over racism.

He confronted his defense secretary June 3 at the White House after Esper held a news conference in which he said that using active-duty military forces to perform law enforcement within the U.S. is "a matter of last resort" and that the National

Guard was better-suited to the task, people familiar with the matter said.

The pushback from Esper followed Trump's threat to send military forces to cities and states that failed to quell violence from the protests, which were sparked by the death of an unarmed Black man, George Floyd, in Minneapolis police custody.

Asked at the time whether the president still had confidence in Esper, White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany responded that "should the president lose faith, we will all learn about that in the future."

White House spokesman Judd Deere said Wednesday: "We have no personnel announcements at this time nor would it be appropriate to speculate about changes after the election or in a second term."

Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman said it's Esper's "highest honor and privilege" to serve the nation.

"He first swore an oath to the Constitution as a West Point cadet over 38 years ago, and has done so many times throughout his adult life, in both war and peace, in uniform and out of uniform," Hoffman said. "He continues that same commitment to duty,

honor, and country today, recognizing that he serves the Nation and leads the men and women of this Department as Secretary of Defense at the pleasure of the president."

An official close to Esper, who asked not to be identified, added that Esper is committed to serving as long as Trump wants him to.

John McEntee, head of Trump's presidential personnel office, is helping strategize possible changes, people familiar with the matter said.

Before pushing back on deploying troops to cities with large-scale protests, Esper and Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had joined Trump on a walk through a public park in front of the White House on June 1, after it had been cleared of peaceful protesters, a move that provoked a bipartisan outcry in Congress and from former military leaders.

Esper, though, has shown more willingness than his predecessor to work with Trump on issues such as drawing down forces in Syria, Afghanistan and Germany, sending U.S. troops to the border with Mexico and shifting funding to help build a border wall.

Move to electronic customs forms put on hold

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — A change to electronic customs forms at U.S. post offices on overseas military bases that was due to happen Thursday has been placed on hold.

"The implementation of non-handwritten customs forms is now postponed due to [the U.S. Postal Service] discovering issues with the new process," the postmaster at Yokota, home of U.S. Forces Japan in

western Tokyo, said in a Facebook message Thursday.

Handwritten customs forms will be accepted until further notice, the postmaster added.

Similar messages were posted on Facebook by post offices at U.S. Army Garrison Japan and Osan Air Base, South Korea, on Thursday.

The Military Postal Service Agency could not be reached Thursday for further information on the scope of the delay.

The Postal Service began transitioning

to electronic customs forms in March due to international regulations but granted military post offices an extension, the service said on its website.

Electronic customs forms can be filled out on the website, which allows people to pay postage online and print shipping labels at home.

Post offices on bases in Europe and the Pacific have been installing kiosks, which include a computer, printer and a scale, to help people submit the electronic forms.

Appeals court says male-only draft is constitutional

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — A federal appeals court in New Orleans upheld the constitutionality of the all-male military draft system Thursday, citing a 1981 U.S. Supreme Court decision.

The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans said "only the Supreme Court may revise its precedent."

The case was argued in March and was the result of a lawsuit by the National Coalition for Men and two men challenging the male-only draft. Their arguments had been that the 1981 case was decided at a time when women were largely absent from combat.

There was no dissent in Thursday's ruling from a three-judge panel.

Plaintiffs in the case could seek a re-

hearing before the full court or go to the Supreme Court.

The U.S. government stopped drafting young men into the military in 1973. But every male must still register for the draft when he turns 18.

Earlier this year — after the arguments before the 5th Circuit — a federal commission recommended including women in the military draft system.

US jobless claims drop under 1 million but still remain high

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of laid-off workers applying for unemployment aid fell below 1 million last week for the first time since the pandemic intensified five months ago, yet it remains at a high level. The pandemic keeps forcing layoffs just as the expiration of a \$600-a-week federal jobless benefit has deepened the hardships for many.

The number of weekly applications declined to 963,000, the second straight drop, from 1.2 million the previous week, the Labor Department said Thursday. The decline signaled that layoffs are slowing, although the latest figure far exceeds the pre-pandemic weekly record of just under 700,000.

The pandemic, the shutdowns that are meant to fight it and the reluctance or inability of many people to shop, travel or eat out continue to weaken

the economy and force companies to cut staff. Twenty-three states have paused or reversed their business reopenings. In a hopeful sign, the rate of new confirmed viral cases has declined in the past couple of weeks, though it remains far above the rates that prevailed during May and June.

Fewer people are continuing to receive state jobless aid. That figure dropped to 15.5 million from 16.1 million the previous week, reflecting that some employers are hiring or re-hiring.

“Another larger-than-expected decline in jobless claims suggests that the jobs recovery is regaining some momentum, but ... much labor market progress remains to be done,” said Lydia Boussour, senior economist at Oxford Economics.

Thursday’s figures, Boussour added, underscore “the painfully slow recovery in the labor market.”

Applications for unemployment aid declined last week in 44 states; several others reported small increases. Nevada said that jobless claims in that state rose 6,900 to more than 20,000. Kansas reported an increase of 2,400 to more than 11,000.

For months, on top of their state benefit, the unemployed had also been receiving the \$600 a week in federal jobless aid. But the federal payment has expired, and negotiations in Congress to extend that benefit, likely at a lower level of payment, have collapsed in rancor.

The supplemental federal aid had enabled many jobless Americans to afford rent, food and utilities, and its expiration threatens to weaken consumer spending and further slow the economy. Unemployment benefits have accounted for roughly 5% of national income since April, a larger share than even Social Security.

Biden, Harris lash Trump at VP debut

Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. — Joe Biden and Kamala Harris pushed past their one-time political rivalry to deliver an aggressive attack on the character and performance of President Donald Trump in their historic first appearance as running mates.

The physical debut of the Democratic ticket on Wednesday was without parallel in recent political annals. The coronavirus prevented Biden and Harris from appearing before the large, adoring crowd that typically greets a presidential nominee and his or her running mate. Instead, they spoke in a mostly empty high school gym where reporters nearly outnumbered campaign aides and the candidates’ family members.

While the pandemic made a traditional campaign rollout impossible, it gave Biden and Harris a setting to emphasize their criticism of Trump as unable to contend with the most severe public health crisis in a century. Harris was particularly sharp in her condemnation of the administration.

“The case against Donald Trump and Mike Pence is open and shut,” Harris said. “This virus has impacted almost every country. But there’s a reason it has hit America worse than any other advanced nation. It’s because of Trump’s failure to take it seriously from the start.”

She added: “This is what happens when we elect a guy who just isn’t up for the job.”

Harris is the first Black woman on a major party’s presidential ticket, and she and Biden noted the historical significance.

“This morning, all across the nation, little girls woke up — especially little Black and brown girls, who so often feel overlooked and undervalued in their communities. But today, today, just maybe, they’re seeing themselves for the first time in a new way,” Biden said.

‘Samaritan shoppers’ help quarantined

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Single sailors and families stuck on 14-day quarantines after coming to Japan need not subsist on vending machine snacks in Yokosuka, thanks to a volunteer program run by the base’s Chapel of Hope and commissary.

U.S. Forces Japan since March has required all personnel and families arriving in Japan from another country to quarantine as a precaution against spreading the coronavirus. For most, that means their first two weeks in Japan are spent in a hotel room with no opportunity to leave, even for a trip to the commissary.

That’s where volunteers from Yokosuka’s Samaritan Shopper Program step in. They take grocery lists from the quarantined folks, shop for and deliver the groceries to their doorsteps, organizer Mia Duhon said. The only thing the recipient is responsible for is providing credit card information to cashiers at checkout.

“Asking for help is very difficult, and these people have reached out to us,” said Duhon, who also works as the chapel’s Catholic religious edu-

cation director. “I want to just hug them when they’re struggling.”

Sailors’ commands are tasked with providing for most needs, but Duhon said the shopper program, which has filled more than 160 shopping requests since its start in May, helps fill in the gaps.

The name of the program comes from the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan, a man who stopped to help a beaten outcast whom others had passed along a roadside. But while the program is co-run through the chapel, there is no religious requirement to participating.

“I would not consider myself a religious person at all, actually,” said the program’s assistant coordinator, Megan Pyle McMechan. “I just believe in doing the right thing for our community and those around us.”

The help is appreciated, said Navy spouse Jeremy Cazares. His family of six requested two shopping trips while staying in a base hotel room for two weeks last month.

“What the Samaritans provide is nothing short of mental health services, as being in ROM — especially with kids — can be very stressful,” Cazares said, referring to the period the U.S. military calls “restriction of movement.”

Governor: Data show Calif. is improving

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — California is showing improvement in its fight against the coronavirus pandemic, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Wednesday, citing a significantly lower number of confirmed new cases as the state begins to clear backlogged cases from a data failure.

The Democratic governor said he also was encouraged by a downward trend in the state's hospitalization rates which he noted are down 21%, and ICU admissions, down 15% over the past 14 days. The number of newly confirmed cases Wednesday, 5,433, was "another indication that we're turning the corner on this pandemic," he said.

The latest figures represent a significant drop from the record 12,807 new daily cases reported statewide during the spike in infections last month.

More than 10,600 people statewide have died, including 180 reported Wednesday, with the great majority in Los Angeles County.

Dr. Roger Lewis, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, said there's been "a clear decline" in hospitalizations, meaning the rates of transmission began to slow two to three weeks ago. Daily said cases are back to where they were in May.

"The consistent downtrend in new cases requiring hospitalization and the slight decrease in transmission rate is good news," he said. "This is what progress looks like when we work together."

Kansas

HUTCHINSON — A Kansas prison has been locked down due to a coronavirus outbreak affecting nearly 100 inmates and staff at the facility, the government announced Wednesday.

Kansas Department of Corrections Secretary Jeff Zmuda said none of the 84 inmates and 10 staff members at the Hutchinson Correctional Facility who tested positive this week are showing symptoms.

Fifteen inmates and seven staff members previously tested positive at the prison, which houses about 1,880 men.

Some inmates will remain locked in their cells because of the new outbreak, while others will be relocated to the prison in Lansing, where a medical unit has been set up to handle COVID-19 cases. Lansing was the site of an earlier outbreak in which more than 900 people became infected.

Kentucky

FRANKFORT — Gov. Andy Beshear said Wednesday he wants to spare Kentucky from the risks of reopening schools too soon, defending his call for districts to delay the resumption of in-person classes and gain more time to get the coronavirus under control.

To make his point, the Democratic governor pointed to a Georgia school district that quarantined more than 900 students and staff members because of possible exposure to the coronavirus.

"I don't believe that we gamble or experiment with our kids," Beshear told reporters. "And while we are all desperate to get our kids back (in school), I also want it to work."

Beshear urged patience as Kentucky posted a record high number of COVID-19 cases, though the report was inflated by cases from previous days that were compiled after a recent computer glitch. But he acknowledged that the coronavirus "is as hot as a firecracker in Kentucky."

Montana

HELENA — Montana's governor announced additional coronavirus relief money for state businesses as the pandemic stretches into its fifth month, a mask mandate for schools in nearly half of the state's counties and said the state will begin paying the extra \$400 in weekly unemployment benefits that President Donald Trump announced over the weekend.

New cases of COVID-19 are leveling off in Montana, but are

not going down, and Gov. Steve Bullock urged residents to continue to wear masks and follow public health directives to help prevent the spread of the respiratory virus.

"The way that we learn to live with this virus in our presence is living in a way where we recognize and acknowledge that significant risk is present, yet collectively we're acting to mitigate this risk," Bullock said, and not by "ignoring or denying or thinking that it'll somehow just magically disappear one day."

Nevada

LAS VEGAS — Nevada is reaching somber coronavirus milestones, topping 58,000 confirmed cases since the pandemic began and approaching 1,000 deaths, state health officials acknowledged Wednesday.

Washoe County's health district officer in Reno also warned against complacency in the face of recent reductions in the spread of the virus.

The confirmed cases reported day-to-day by the state Department of Health and Human Services brought the number to 58,048, with at least 996 deaths.

In Las Vegas, the Southern Nevada Health District has tallied 50,081 confirmed cases and 842 deaths, or nearly 85% of the state's fatalities.

South Carolina

COLUMBIA — South Carolina's top medical official overseeing the response to the coronavirus pandemic says new data shows mask ordinances are helping stem the spread of the illness.

"We will be in a much better position in four to six weeks if South Carolinians practice physical distancing and use a mask," Dr. Linda Bell, South Carolina's state epidemiologist, said in a statement Wednesday.

"Together, we can completely reverse our fortunes and create safe environments for our business recovery, for our lifestyle recovery, and particularly

for our students returning to school in a few short weeks, but we must act more aggressively, and now," she continued.

Vermont

WINOOSKI — The Vermont Health Department says an outbreak of COVID-19 that began in the city of Winooski is over.

Health Commissioner Dr. Mark Levine said Wednesday the outbreak is considered over because 28 days have passed since any new infections connected to it have been reported.

"Now keep in mind this isn't really a celebration," Levine said during an online briefing with local officials. "The pandemic is far from over."

The outbreak was first identified in June, primarily in the immigrant community in the densely packed city of Winooski.

The outbreak included 117 infections, 77 in Winooski, 22 in Burlington and 18 in other towns in Chittenden and Grand Isle counties. Two people were hospitalized, but there were no deaths.

Washington

SEATTLE — The Seattle school board on Wednesday unanimously voted to begin the academic year remotely.

The plan for the state's largest school district passed with a wide-ranging amendment that directs the superintendent to explore creating outdoor classes, and also reinforces teaching of Black studies and curricula developed by tribes, The Seattle Times reported.

Seattle Public Schools Superintendent Denise Juneau had previously recommended a fully remote learning model for the start of the school year, which was endorsed by the principals labor union and teachers union.

However, the district's specific plans are far from set because Seattle Public Schools is still bargaining with the teachers union, the Seattle Education Association.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man who broke into home shot with own gun

NE OMAHA — An Omaha man who allegedly broke into a home and tried to steal two dogs at gunpoint was shot with his own gun during a struggle over it.

Omaha Police said the 29-year-old man was shot by a resident of a home in northeast Omaha shortly before midnight Tuesday as the resident took the gun away from the suspect.

The man was found a short time later when he went to a hospital for treatment of the gunshot wound, and he was arrested after he was treated for the injury.

Court records show that the wounded man is already awaiting trial on charges of robbery and criminal impersonation in two separate felony cases.

Police: Man robbed of cash by his online date

MA BOSTON — Police say a rendezvous arranged on an online dating app ended poorly for a man in Boston after his date pulled a stun gun and robbed him.

Authorities say the man met the woman at a local hotel Tuesday morning. He told officers the two spoke for about half an hour before his date took out a Taser stun gun. The woman then went through the man's pockets, stealing about \$100 in cash.

The man notified hotel security after escaping the hotel room. Police say that when officers arrived, the woman initially denied having met the victim. A pink Taser was located on the woman's luggage and she was arrested.

Police identified the woman as Selena Rivera-Apodaca, 24,

of Kent, Wash. She is expected to be arraigned on a charge of armed robbery.

It was not immediately clear if she was represented by an attorney.

Prison for man who claimed to be FBI agent

AZ PRESCOTT — A Cottonwood man has been sentenced to 1½ years in an Arizona prison after pleading guilty to two counts of impersonating a peace officer.

Prosecutors said David Michael Getzen, 59, called the Yavapai County jail last October claiming to be an FBI agent. In the call, Getzen said the detention facility needed to “surrender” two sheriff's deputies, authorities said.

Getzen also was accused of threatening to shoot two county Superior Court judges plus the sheriff and county attorney if the jail didn't release the individuals.

In another call, authorities said Getzen claimed he had a warrant for the arrest of a deputy county sheriff. Detectives identified Getzen as the caller and he was arrested the next day.

Wayward emu captured running through city

NJ PATERSON — An emu was taken to an animal shelter after it was captured while running through the streets of a northern New Jersey city.

A woman spotted the long-legged bird Tuesday morning in a residential neighborhood near Paterson's border with Totowa.

Animal control officers snared the emu, which is about 4-feet tall. The emu was placed

in a large animal cart and was taken to a shelter, where officials arranged for the emu to be examined by a veterinarian. Officials were not sure whether the bird had escaped from a farm or was just running out in the wild.

Chief Animal Control Officer John DeCando told NJ.com the emu appeared healthy. He could not determine its age or sex, “but I can tell you it needs a bath,” DeCando said.

Auction for former missile site falls short

ND BISMARCK — An auction for a former missile site in northeastern North Dakota fell short of the hoped-for price Tuesday.

Over 70 bidders were registered online to bid on the 50-acre, double-fenced, Cold War-era site near Fairdale. Leslie Volochnenko, of Mandan, bought the property in 2012 and put it up for sale since he hopes to move to Texas.

Dave Keller of Pifer's Auction & Realty conducted the auction but said the highest bidder fell short of the nearly half-million-dollar price Volochnenko hoped to get.

Keller said they are negotiating with the highest bidder, who is a man from North Dakota, and hope to have things figured out by the end of the week.

The Bismarck Tribune reported the site includes a command bunker and 14 missile launch tubes.

Man killed in parking tiff; neighbor charged

MO ST. LOUIS — A St. Louis man has been charged, accused of fatally shooting a neighbor during an argument over street parking, then of trying to kill the vic-

tim's wife.

Troy Jackson Jr., 28, was charged Monday with first-degree murder, assault and other counts for the June 16 killing of Jermaine Hicks, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported.

Police said Jackson shot Hicks as the two argued over street parking on the block where both men lived. Hicks' wife was inside their home at the time and saw Jackson shoot her husband, investigators said, and went outside to confront Jackson. Police said Jackson then fled, but later returned to the house. He is accused of barging through the front door and firing shots at Hicks' wife inside the home. Police said he missed and exhausted all of the rounds in his gun before fleeing.

Jackson is being held without bail.

Family rescues dog nearly 4 miles offshore

MI FRANKFORT — A dog treading water nearly four miles offshore in Lake Michigan has been rescued by a family out on a boating trip.

The family was boating from Grand Haven to Frankfort in northwestern Michigan on Friday when Jeannie Wilcox said she saw a “red animal in the lake” and started screaming, “dog in the water!” They got the dog onto the boat's swim platform and dried her off, Wilcox told WOOD-TV.

The family had the dog scanned for a microchip. The owners later were located and reunited with their dog.

“I just hope that if this was my dog, somebody would do the same for me,” Wilcox said. “I would just be very grateful, happy because I know how rough Lake Michigan can be.”

From wire reports

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Big 12 will have fall sports

Associated Press

Baylor coach Dave Aranda could see a weight being lifted off the shoulders of his players during a meeting Tuesday night, when word began to filter out that the Big 12 Conference would attempt to play football this fall.

"You could just see the joy," Aranda said. "Everyone was smiling. Guys were cracking jokes, were excited."

Months of uncertainty had finally given the Bears and their conference rivals the slightest bit of clarity. If all goes according to plan, they will take the field for a nonconference game next month, then begin a round-robin league schedule on Sept. 26 with the intention of crowning a Big 12 champion on Dec. 12 near Dallas.

That doesn't mean they will be competing for a national title, though. The Atlantic Coast and Southeastern conferences have so far joined the Big 12 in playing this fall, but the Big Ten, Pac-12 and many smaller conferences are trying for the spring.

So will there be two national champions, like there sometimes were when poll voters declared who was best? Will an autumn champion play a spring champion? Will this year, like so many things around the world, simply be one to forget?

Those are among the questions that still must be answered.

"We have a College Football Playoff call next week and we'll obviously talk about this. It's going to be a while into the season before all that is resolved," Big 12 commissioner Bob Bowlsby said Wednesday. "There probably isn't any obvious reason why it couldn't work to continue to try to play a postseason, but you're looking at a December-January time frame right in the heart of the virus season. I just think it's too early. We're going to have to be patient."

Patience is something the league has been preaching since March, when the coronavirus pandemic began shutting down sports in the U.S. as it turned the world upside down.

The Big 12's board of directors have been speaking on an almost-daily basis with infectious disease experts, scientists and physicians while getting the input of coaches, administrators and athletes. It came up with a plan it believes will work.

Fall sports will begin after Sept. 1 with football playing a schedule in which each team can play one nonconference game before league play begins a few weeks later.

The schools will all play each other to give them 10 total games.

All athletes will be subject to three tests per week — likely Sunday, Wednesday and Friday — in "high contact" sports such as football, volleyball and soccer. Should an athlete test positive, they would be subject to echocardiograms, a cardiac MRI, blood tests and other examinations before they are cleared to return.

Nonconference opponents also must adhere to Big 12 standards the week before competition.

Sports briefs

Source: 49ers, Kittle agree on extension

Associated Press

All-Pro tight end George Kittle has reportedly agreed to a five-year, \$75 million extension with the San Francisco 49ers that is the richest contract ever at the position.

NFL Network first reported the terms and says the deal includes an \$18 million signing bonus.

Locking up Kittle, one of the NFL's biggest bargains after being drafted in the fifth round in 2017, was a high priority this offseason for the Niners.

Kittle has been the most productive tight end in NFL history through his first three seasons with 197 catches for 2,664 yards. But he is almost equally as skilled as a blocker in the run game where he is a key piece in coach Kyle Shanahan's dynamic offense.

The Niners averaged 5.0 yards per carry last season with Kittle on the field, compared to 3.5 yards per carry without him, according to NFL NextGen stats.

MLS players booed for collectively kneeling

There was a smattering of boos when players from FC Dallas and Nashville SC collectively took a knee during the national anthem before their MLS game on Wednesday night in Frisco, Texas.

Dallas defender Reggie Cannon said he was disgusted by the boos at Toyota Stadium when players and officials knelt to call attention to racial injustice. He said teammate Ryan Hollingshead turned to him afterward and said he was sorry.

"You can't even have support from your own fans in your own stadium. It's baffling to me," Cannon said. "As a team we try to give the best possible product on the field and these last six months have been absolute hell for us. Absolute hell."

— Associated Press

NFL, union reach deal to extend daily virus testing

Associated Press

The NFL extended daily coronavirus testing for players and staff until further notice even though the positive test rate from the first two weeks of camp has been under 1 percent.

Under the original agreement between the league and the NFL Players Association, players and staff needed three negative tests in a four-day period before they could report to the facility and then daily testing for the next two weeks.

If the positive rate from that first stretch of daily testing was below 5 percent, the plan was to shift to testing every other day.

But the league and the union decided Wednesday to extend

that period as they use more rapid onsite testing and as contact increases when padded practices start around the league next week.

"I think the bottom line is we're continuing to learn a great deal from our testing results," said Dr. Allen Sills, the NFL's chief medical officer. "I think that given the protocol changes that we recently made, as well as the use of this additional point of care technology and the recognition that we're about to go into more of team-based activity during training camp, that we and the Players Association together felt it was prudent to extend the daily testing."

Sills reported that there were 53 new positives out of 2,840 tests of players upon arrival, which works out to 1.9%. The rate of new positives for all staff upon arrival was at 1.7%.

Since then, the league has conducted 109,075 tests through Tuesday with 0.46% of all tests coming up as positive and 0.81% of players testing positive.

"I think we were pleasantly surprised at how few positive tests we had," Sills said of the initial results. "I think since that time, that positivity rate that I gave you reflects the fact that our teams have done, and our players, staff and coaches have done, a terrific job of staying uninfected."

NHL roundup

Bruins edge 'Canes in 2OT

Associated Press

TORONTO — After being told to come back the next morning because another game lasted five overtimes, the Boston Bruins didn't want to repeat history so quickly.

"We talked about trying to end this before the fifth overtime," Patrice Bergeron said.

Bergeron accomplished that by scoring early in double overtime, and the Bruins beat the Carolina Hurricanes 4-3 Wednesday in Game 1 of their first-round series that was postponed 15 hours to a rare late-morning start.

The game scheduled for 8 p.m. Tuesday night began the next morning at 11 after the Columbus Blue Jackets-Tampa Bay Lightning series opener became the fourth-longest playoff game in NHL history. Playing all Eastern Conference games at Toronto's Scotiabank Arena had this potential for games going long messing with the schedule.

"We knew it was a possibility," said Bergeron, whose four playoff OT goals are the second-most behind Patrick Kane among active players. "You didn't expect five overtimes, but that being said, we knew it's part of having a tournament like this in one rink and be ready for the unexpected."

Canucks 5, Blues 2: Bo Horvat scored twice and the Vancouver Canucks beat the defending Stanley Cup champion St. Louis Blues 5-2 on Wednesday in the opening game of their best-of-seven first-round series.

Game 2 is set for Friday night.

Islanders 4, Capitals 2: At Toronto, Josh Bailey scored a short-handed goal 6:52 into the third period and New York overcame a two-goal deficit to beat Washington in a hard-hitting opener to the first-round playoff series.

Flyers 2, Canadiens 1: At Toronto, Carter Hart made 27 saves, Joel Farabee scored 16 seconds after Montreal tied it, and Philadelphia won Game 1 of their first-round playoff series.

Ivan Provorov also scored for the Flyers. Shea Weber scored for the Canadiens, and Carey Price stopped 29 shots.

Avalanche 3, Coyotes 0: At Edmonton, Alberta, Nazem Kadri and J.T. Compher scored 10 seconds apart in the third period, Philipp Grubauer stopped 14 shots and Colorado opened the playoffs with a victory over Arizona.

The Avalanche dominated the Coyotes through the first two periods, outshooting them 29-7, yet couldn't get anything past goalie Darcy Kuemper.

NBA sees seven of the eight first-round matchups set

Associated Press

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — The NBA playoff bracket is nearly set.

Wednesday's results filled in five of what were the six unknown matchups for Round 1 of the postseason, which starts next week at Walt Disney World.

In the Western Conference: Houston and Oklahoma City will meet in the first round, meaning Rockets guard Russell Westbrook and Thunder guard Chris Paul get the chance to face their former teams.

"It'll be interesting," Paul said. "Two teams that know a lot about each other."

Other West matchups that got clinched on Wednesday include the second-seeded Los Angeles Clippers against No. 7 Dallas, and No. 3 Denver against No. 6 Utah.

In the East, Miami and Indiana will meet in the first round — after the clubs close the regular season on Friday against one another to decide which team will be seeded No. 4 and which will be No. 5.

Indiana's win over Houston on Wednesday set what had been the last two unknown series in the East bracket. No. 3 Boston will play No. 6 Philadelphia in a meeting between longtime rivals, and the Pacers are now locked into an East opening series

against the Heat — with the potential of those teams playing nine times in a span of 10 games.

Miami beat Indiana on Monday. The teams meet again Friday then face off in Game 1 to begin a best-of-seven series early next week. That means, for just the second time since 2011, teams that end the regular season against one another will open the postseason against one another. The last time it happened was 2016, when Cleveland faced Detroit.

The other East matchups were known previously: No. 1 Milwaukee plays No. 8 Orlando, and No. 2 Toronto plays No. 7 Brooklyn.

In the West, Houston and Oklahoma City will be in the 4-5 matchup and Utah will be the No. 6 seed. The Jazz were locked into that slot by the Thunder defeating Miami, and Denver became the No. 3 seed when it lost to the Clippers.

The full list of matchups won't be known until at least Saturday, when the West play-in series begins with Portland, Memphis, Phoenix and San Antonio bidding for those two spots. The winner of that series will take on the top-seeded Los Angeles Lakers in the first round, the only matchup that's yet to be determined.

NBA roundup

Clippers defeat Nuggets, wrap up No. 2 seed in West

Associated Press

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — Paul George scored 27 points, Kawhi Leonard had 26 and the Los Angeles Clippers wrapped up the second seed in the Western Conference playoffs with a 124-111 win over third-seeded Denver on Wednesday.

The Clippers will face seventh-seeded Dallas when the playoffs start next week.

Los Angeles took control with 13 straight points midway through the third quarter and barely let the Nuggets get back in it.

George and Leonard were big reasons why. George made two three-pointers midway through the period, and Leonard sprinted to midcourt while on defense, picked off a pass at mid-court and glided in for a basket.

The Clippers took the lead for good with

10 minutes left on Lou Williams' jumper and steadily built the advantage to double digits on the way to their second straight win over the Northwest Division champions.

Pacers 108, Rockets 104: Myles Turner had 18 points, reserve Edmond Sumner added a season-high 17 and Indiana held off a late rally by and James Harden and his teammates to break a five-game losing streak to Houston.

Raptors 125, 76ers 121: Stanley Johnson scored the tiebreaking basket in the lane with 4.9 seconds remaining, giving Toronto a victory over Philadelphia that made a winner of Adrian Griffin.

Thunder 115, Heat 115: Mike Muscala made a three-pointer with 5.2 seconds and Oklahoma City overcame a 22-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat Miami.

MLB roundup

Cubs top Tribe for best start in 50 years

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Bell bottoms were in style and Nixon was in the White House the last time the Chicago Cubs started a season this hot.

Their rookie manager isn't taking any credit for the fast start.

"I mean, I've got a good team," David Ross said. "That's what it is. We've got good players."

Kyle Hendricks pitched six strong innings in his first appearance against Cleveland since Game 7 of the 2016 World Series and Anthony Rizzo homered, leading the Cubs to a 7-2 win over the Indians on Wednesday night to match their best start in 50 years.

Hendricks (3-1) didn't have much trouble with the slumping Indians, who came in batting a major league-worst .192. He allowed one run and seven hits — threw 18 straight strikes in one juncture — and handled everyone in Cleveland's lineup but Franmil Reyes, who got three hits.

The Cubs are 12-3 in their first season under Ross, matching the club's start after 15 games in 1970.

Since taking over, Ross has preached about being positive and energetic and the constant chatter coming Chicago's dugout is evidence his players are listening.

"There is nothing to complain about because the talent's there, the character's there, the commitment, the focus, the energy, the work," Ross said. "It's not easy, especially in the environment we're dealing with now. I've got really good players, man."

"I just put them in the lineup and I start trying to cheerlead them on. They're really good."

Rizzo homered in the third off Carlos Carrasco (2-2), David Bote drove in two runs and Kris Bryant connected for a 430-foot shot as the Cubs swept the two-game interleague set.

Hendricks hadn't faced the Indians since Nov. 2, 2016, when he started the dramatic finale

as the Cubs beat the Indians in extra innings to clinch their first Series title since 1908. The right-hander is as efficient now as he was four years ago.

"I'm just happy that we are where we are right now," he said. "You never know why things click at a certain time. I think we missed baseball so much being out for so long that it just gave us that little breather, and guys are really just excited to be around each other and excited to be playing the game again."

Athletics 8, Angels 4: Stephen Piscotty, Matt Olson and Robbie Grossman homered, center fielder Ramon Laureano made three nifty catches and host Oakland averted a sweep with a win over Los Angeles.

Piscotty put the A's ahead with his solo drive in the fourth inning. Olson and Grossman also went deep off Griffin Canning (0-3).

Seven of Oakland's nine hits were for extra bases, including a pair of doubles by Matt Chapman.

Chris Bassitt (2-0) went 5²/₃ innings en route to his third straight win against the Angels. The right-hander gave up four runs on five hits while striking out four.

Mike Trout and Anthony Rendon hit solo homers for Los Angeles.

Marlins 14, Blue Jays 11 (10): Magneuris Sierra hit a go-ahead single in the 10th inning and Miami overcame Toronto's seven home runs in the final game of its season-opening, three-week road trip.

Bo Bichette went 5-for-5 for the Blue Jays, a day after homering during a 10-inning win in their first game at their new Buffalo home. He connected again as Toronto became the fourth team in major league history to lose while slugging at least seven homers.

After this detour to Sahlen Field, the Marlins finally get to go home.

Diamondbacks 13, Rockies 7: Starling Marte homered

and drove in four runs as Arizona won at Colorado in a Coors Field slugfest featuring 34 hits, but none by blistering Charlie Blackmon.

Blackmon went 0-for-4, ending his hitting streak at 15 games, and his average dipped to .472. Nolan Arenado homered twice and doubled for the Rockies.

Marte had three hits, including a go-ahead single in an eight-run seventh inning. It was 5-all going into the inning.

Nick Ahmed had three hits and a pair of RBIs and Kole Calhoun added three hits with an RBI for the Diamondbacks.

Rangers 7, Mariners 4: — Todd Frazier scored the tie-breaking run on a wild pitch in the eighth inning, Willie Calhoun then hit a two-run single and Texas overcame an early four-run deficit to beat visiting Seattle.

Derek Dietrich had three hits and was hit by a pitch, becoming the first player since Joey Gallo in June 2015 to reach base safely four times.

Dodgers 6, Padres 0: Tony Gonsolin and five relievers combined on a six-hit shutout, Justin Turner hit a three-run homer, and host Los Angeles beat San Diego and avoided losing three in a row for the first time since last August.

Blake Treinen (1-1) got the win, striking out three in 1¹/₃ innings.

White Sox 7, Tigers 5: Tim Anderson had four hits and finished a double shy of the cycle, and Luis Robert hit a bases-clearing double to lift Chicago to a win at Detroit.

Anderson and Eloy Jimenez led off the game with consecutive home runs.

Yankees 6, Braves 3: Injury fill-in Clint Frazier had three hits, including a home run, and scored twice in his season debut as host New York swept a two-game set with Atlanta.

Royals 5, Reds 4: Streaking Salvador Perez had three more hits, including a homer and RBI double, Cincinnati

left-hander Wade Miley made another early exit after a misstep, and Kansas City won its fifth victory in six games.

The Royals' offense has led the way during the surge. It scored one run at a time to keep it going, led by Perez's homer, double and single. Brad Keller (2-0) allowed two singles in six shutout innings. The bullpen barely held on.

Rays 9, Red Sox 5: Blake Snell pitched five shutout innings and Tampa Bay backed him with a trio of 400-foot homers to win at Boston and earn a fifth straight victory.

Mets 11, Nationals 6: Pete Alonso and Dominic Smith had back-to-back RBI doubles in a four-run first inning and hit consecutive homers in a five-run sixth, leading New York over visiting Washington.

The fourth, fifth and sixth batters in the Mets' lineup, Michael Conforto, Alonso and Smith, went 7-for-11 with eight RBIs, eight runs scored, three walks and a hit batsman in 15 plate appearances.

Twins 12, Brewers 2: Byron Buxton hit two solo homers and Miguel Sano added another as Minnesota jumped to an early lead and won at Milwaukee.

The victory gave the AL Central-leading Twins a 2-1 series win over the Brewers, who dropped to 2-6 at home.

Orioles 5, Phillies 4: Ryo Ruiz, Chance Sisco and Anthony Santander homered to lead Baltimore past Philadelphia.

Baltimore took the first two games of the series and has won four straight completed games — it is also winning a game that was suspended Sunday against Washington.

Astros 5, Giants 1: Martin Maldonado hit a three-run home run to back a strong start by Zack Greinke and help Houston beat visiting San Francisco.

Greinke (1-0) allowed one run and scattered seven hits over a season-high 6¹/₃ innings for his first win. He struck out seven and walked one.