

Taliban sweep through southern areas

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban completed their sweep of Afghanistan's south on Friday, taking four more provincial capitals in a lightning offensive that brought them closer to Kabul just weeks before the U.S. is set to officially end its two-decade war.

In the last 24 hours, the country's second- and third-largest cities — Herat in the west and Kandahar in the south — have fallen to the insurgents, as has the capital of the southern province of Helmand, where American, British and NATO forces fought some of the bloodiest battles of the conflict.

The blitz through the Taliban's southern heartland means the insurgents now hold half of Afghanistan's 34 provincial capitals and control more than two-thirds of the country. The Western-backed government in the capital, Kabul, still holds a smattering of provinces in the center and east, as well as the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

While Kabul is not directly under threat yet, the resurgent Taliban were battling government forces in Logar province, some 50 miles from the capital. The U.S. military has estimated that Kabul could come under insurgent pressure within 30 days and that the Taliban could overrun the rest of the country within a few months. They have already taken over much of the north and west of the country.

In the south, insurgents swept through three provincial capitals on Friday.

Attaullah Afghan, the head of the provincial council in Helmand, said the Taliban captured Lashkar Gah following weeks of heavy fighting and raised their white flag over governmental buildings. He said that three army bases outside of the city remain under government control.

In Tiring Kot, the capital of the southern Uruzgan province, Taliban fighters paraded through a main square, driving a Humvee and a pickup seized from Afghan forces. Local officials confirmed

that the Taliban also captured the capitals of Zabul province in the south and Ghor in the west.

Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have fled their homes amid fears the Taliban will return the country to the sort of brutal, repressive rule it imposed when it was last in power at the turn of the millennium. At that time, the group all but eliminated women's rights and conducted public executions as it imposed an unsparing version of Islamic law. An early sign of such tactics came in Herat, where insurgents paraded two alleged looters through the streets on Friday with black makeup smeared on their faces.

There are also concerns that the fighting could plunge the country into civil war, which is what happened after the Soviets withdrew in 1989.

The U.N. refugee agency said nearly 250,000 Afghans have been forced to flee their homes since the end of May, and 80% of those displaced are women and children. In all, the agency said, some 400,000 civilians have been

displaced since the beginning of the year.

Hasibullah Stanikzai, the head of the Logar provincial council, said fighting was still underway inside Puli-e Alim, with government forces holding the police headquarters and other security facilities. He spoke by phone from his office, and gunfire could be heard in the background.

A day earlier, in Herat, Taliban fighters seized government buildings. Herat had been under militant attack for two weeks, with one wave blunted by the arrival of warlord Ismail Khan and his forces. But on Thursday afternoon, Taliban fighters broke through the city's defensive lines.

The insurgents circulated photos and a video showing Khan in their captivity.

In Kandahar, insurgents seized the governor's office and other buildings, witnesses said, adding that the governor and other officials fled. They spoke on condition of anonymity because the defeat has yet to be acknowledged by the government.

US rushes in troops to speed evacuations from Kabul

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Three thousand fresh U.S. troops were rushing to Kabul on Friday in a temporary deployment to speed evacuation flights for some American diplomats and thousands of Afghans, as the Taliban pressed a lightning offensive that has captured much of the country and risks isolating Afghanistan's capital city.

The Pentagon also was moving another 4,500 to 5,000 troops to bases in the Gulf countries of Qatar and Kuwait, including 1,000 to Qatar to speed up visa processing

for Afghan translators and others who fear retribution from the Taliban for their past work with Americans, and their family members.

The remainder — 3,500 to 4,000 troops from a combat brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division — were bound for Kuwait. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said the combat troops would be a reserve force on standby "in case we need even more" than the 3,000 going to Kabul.

The temporary buildup of troops for U.S. evacuations highlights the stunning pace of the Ta-

liban takeover of much of the country, less than three weeks before the U.S. is set to officially end nearly 20 years of combat in Afghanistan.

The Taliban, emboldened by the imminent end of the U.S. combat mission in the country, took four more provincial capitals Friday. The advance is gradually encircling Kabul, home to millions of Afghans.

The U.S. had already withdrawn most of its troops, but had kept about 650 troops in Afghanistan to support U.S. diplomatic security, including at the airport.

As of Thursday, the U.S. has flown 1,200 Afghans — former American employees and their families whose visas are farthest along in the approval process — to Fort Lee, Va.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said Thursday that the U.S. soon will have evacuation planes flying out daily, for those Afghan translators and others who manage to reach the Kabul airport despite the fighting. The number of Afghans flown out under the special visa program is going to "grow very quickly in the coming days," Price said.

Vets despair as Taliban take over cities

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — U.S. troops who deployed to Afghanistan over the past two decades say the Taliban's rapid conquest of much of the country has left them stunned and dismayed.

"This one will hurt for a long time, man," said Sean Gustafson, a retired Army lieutenant colonel who deployed to the city of Herat in western Afghanistan from 2006 to 2007.

The capture of Herat by the Taliban on Thursday shocked Gustafson. On Friday, he forwarded to Stars and Stripes photos from 2007 of him and other service members building schools and handing out books to children.

Now, like other veterans of America's longest war, he can only watch from afar as the projects he worked on and the people he tried to help come under threats from the Taliban.

The Taliban controlled an estimated two-thirds of the country as of Friday, after gaining several provincial capitals and large cities throughout the country.

The collapse of much of the Afghan military has come weeks before the scheduled Aug. 31 final withdrawal of U.S. troops ordered by President Joe Biden. The withdrawal stems from a peace deal signed last

year by the Taliban and the Trump administration.

The final days of the U.S. war in Afghanistan should have been handled better, several veterans told Stars and Stripes.

"A complete pullout is not only unnecessary, it is sabotage," said Army Staff Sgt. Seamus Fennessy, who fought in Ghazni province in 2010.

The withdrawal was "a betrayal of American and international forces who have expended so much in life and limb to prevent the resurgence of the Taliban," Fennessy said in a Facebook message.

Some U.S. troops should have stayed in the country to preserve the gains of the last 20 years, he said.

"Maybe we stayed longer than we should have, but the manner in which we pulled out, it's just unfortunate, and my heart breaks," said Christy Barry, who deployed to Afghanistan multiple times as both an Air Force officer and a civilian adviser.

Like other veterans, Barry said she's been deluged with messages from people seeking her help to get visas to escape the country.

Many U.S., British, Afghan and allied troops sacrificed much in pursuit of a modernized Afghanistan, said Richard Mills, a retired Marine lieutenant general who commanded in the southern province of Hel-

mand from 2009 to 2011.

Mills recalled efforts to build the enormous Kajaki Dam, with hopes of bringing electrical power and prosperity to the area.

The U.S. invested more than \$775 million into the dam since 2004, betting that it would bolster support for the government and turn people against the Taliban.

U.S. Marines and British troops launched the Battle of Sangin in part to secure supply lines to the dam. It was the bloodiest campaign of the war, with more than 100 coalition troops killed in action.

With U.S. help, the Afghan government installed a third turbine generator in the dam in 2017, greatly increasing the electricity supply to the region, a 2019 report by the United States Agency for International Development said.

But the dam's success did nothing to stem the Taliban's power in Helmand, which fell to the militant group Friday.

The U.S. came close to "turning the tide" in Helmand province, Mills said in a phone call Thursday. He said Americans had constructed several pillars of stability in Helmand by shoring up the economy, establishing schools and providing security.

"It's sad to see that those pillars are being destroyed one at a time by the Taliban," Mills said. "To see it snatched away, of course it's hard."

Richardson confirmed to lead Southern Command

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Army Lt. Gen. Laura Richardson was confirmed by the Senate in a unanimous voice vote on Wednesday to become the next commander of U.S. Southern Command, which will make her just the second woman in history to lead a combatant command.

Richardson, who now leads U.S. Army North, will receive a fourth star before taking command of SOUTHCOM, which oversees U.S. military operations across South and Central America and the Caribbean. She will become just

the second female four-star general in the Army's history.

Richardson will replace SOUTHCOM's outgoing chief, Navy Adm. Craig Faller, who has led the combatant command headquartered just outside Miami since November 2018. The Defense Department has yet to set a date for the change of command, a SOUTHCOM spokesman said Thursday.

SOUTHCOM leaders have traditionally faced challenges in the region such as drug trafficking, narcoterrorism, providing humanitarian and disaster relief, and overseeing

the controversial detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Richardson will also inherit responsibility for operations in a portion of the globe that has been devastated by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. She will also have to work to ensure the United States retains its long-held influence throughout the vast majority of the region, where Russia and China in recent years have increased efforts to work with and influence nations in the Western Hemisphere.

Richardson told senators last week during her confirmation hearing on Capitol Hill

that her priorities included expanding training exercises and other security cooperation operations with partner nations in the region and increasing opportunities for partner nations in the region to send their troops to U.S. military training and education programs.

Richardson could soon be followed by the third female to lead a combatant command. President Joe Biden nominated Air Force Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost to lead U.S. Transportation Command. The Senate has yet to formally consider her nomination.

Vaccine mandates are a balancing act

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — When the pace of vaccinations in the U.S. first began to slow, President Joe Biden backed incentives like million-dollar cash lotteries if that's what it took to get shots in arms. But as new coronavirus infections soar, he's testing a tougher approach.

In just the past two weeks, Biden has forced millions of federal workers to attest to their vaccination status or face onerous new requirements. He's met with business leaders at the White House to press them to do the same.

Meanwhile, the administration has taken steps toward mandating shots for people traveling into the U.S. from overseas. And the White House is weighing options to be more assertive at the state and local level, in-

cluding potential support for school districts imposing rules to prevent spread of the virus over the objection of Republican leaders.

"To the mayors, school superintendents, educators, local leaders, who are standing up to the governors politicizing mask protection for our kids: thank you," Biden said Thursday. "Thank God that we have heroes like you, and I stand with you all, and America should as well."

But even as Biden becomes more aggressive, he has refrained from using all his powers to pressure Americans to get vaccinated. He's held off, for instance, on proposals to require vaccinations for all air travelers or, for that matter, the federal workforce. The result is a precarious balancing act as Biden works to make life more uncomfortable for the unvaccinated without spurring a back-

lash in a deeply polarized country that would only undermine his public health goals.

Vaccine mandates are "the right lever at the right time," said Ben Wakana, the deputy director of strategic communications and engagement for the White House COVID-19 response.

Many Republicans, particularly those eyeing the party's 2024 presidential nomination, disagree and warn of federal overreaching into decisions that should be left to individuals.

There is notable support for vaccine mandates. According to a recent poll from the Kaiser Family Foundation, 51% of Americans say the federal government should recommend that employers require their workers to get vaccinated, while 45% say it should not.

States that had grip on COVID now have surge

Associated Press

The COVID-19 surge that is sending hospitalizations to all-time highs in parts of the South is also clobbering states like Hawaii and Oregon that were once seen as pandemic success stories.

After months in which they kept cases and hospitalizations at manageable levels, they are watching progress slip away as record numbers of patients overwhelm bone-tired health care workers.

Oregon — like Florida, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana in recent days — has more people in the hospital with COVID-19

than at any other point in the pandemic. Hawaii is about to reach that mark, too.

This, despite both states having vaccination levels higher than the national average as of last week. Arkansas and Louisiana were significantly below average, while Florida was about even. Mississippi, meanwhile, ranks at the very bottom for vaccination rates.

"It's heartbreaking. People are exhausted. You can see it in their eyes," said Dr. Jason Kuhl, chief medical officer at Oregon's Providence Medford Medical Center, where patients are left on gurneys in hall-

ways, their monitoring machines beeping away. Others needing treatment for cancer or heart disease are being turned away.

The U.S. is seeing the virus storming back, driven by a combination of the highly contagious delta variant and lagging vaccination rates, especially in the South and other rural and conservative parts of the country.

New cases nationwide are averaging about 123,000 per day, a level last seen in early February, and deaths are running at over 500 a day, turning the clock back to May.

Moderate Dems demand passage of public works bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Moderate House Democrats say they would sink a crucial fiscal blueprint outlining \$3.5 trillion in social and environment spending unless a separate infrastructure bill is approved first, a new complication for the divided party's drive to enact President Joe Biden's domestic agenda.

The centrists' threat directly defies House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's announced plans, and she is initially showing no signs of backing down. It also completes a two-sided squeeze on the California Democrat, who has received similar pressure from her party's progressives.

Democrats can only pass legislation in the

narrowly divided House if they lose no more than three votes. Solid Republican opposition seems certain.

"We will not consider voting for a budget resolution until the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passes the House and is signed into law," nine centrists wrote in a letter to Pelosi obtained Friday by The Associated Press.

Ultimate House passage of the budget resolution seems certain because without it, Senate Republicans would be able to use a filibuster, or procedural delays, to kill a follow-up \$3.5 trillion measure bolstering social safety net and climate change programs. That measure, not expected until autumn, represents

the heart of Biden's domestic agenda.

Pelosi has repeatedly said the House will not vote on the \$1 trillion package of road, rail, water and other infrastructure projects until the Senate sends the House the companion \$3.5 trillion bill.

Pelosi has set that sequence because her party's progressives have worried that if the infrastructure bill is approved first, moderates unhappy with the separate \$3.5 trillion measure's cost would feel free to vote against it, causing its defeat.

The letter was dated Thursday and reported earlier by Punchbowl News, a publication that covers Capitol Hill, and The New York Times.

Wildfires threaten towns in Mont., Calif.

Associated Press

LAME DEER, Mont. — Wildfires in Montana threatened rural towns and ranchland, and victims of a California blaze returned to their incinerated town even as the region faced another round of dangerous weather.

Firefighters and residents scrambled to save hundreds of homes as flames continued to advance on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in southeastern Montana.

Since Sunday, the fire has carved its way through some 260 square miles and prompted evacuation orders for thousands of people.

As the fire raged across rugged hills and narrow ravines, tribal member Darlene Small helped her grandson move about 100 head of cattle to a new pasture, only to relocate them twice more as the flames from the Richard Spring fire bore down, she said

Thursday. An extreme drought that's blanketing the West has made matters worse by stunting vegetation untouched by fire.

"They've got to have pasture where there's water. If there's no water, there's no good pasture," Small said. Particularly hard hit were some ranchers already depending on surplus grass after a fire burned them off their normal pasture last year, she said.

Gusts and low humidity were creating extreme fire behavior as flames devoured brush, short grass and timber, fire officials said.

The same conditions turned California's Dixie Fire into a furious blaze that last week burned down much of the small town of Greenville in the northern Sierra Nevada. The fire that began a month ago has destroyed some 550 homes.

On Thursday, residents were trying to cope with the magnitude of the losses.

"Everything that I own is now ashes or twisted metal. That's just all it is," said Greenville resident Ken Donnell, who escaped with just the clothes on his back.

Donnell said he was heart-broken but "by God, I'm gonna smile. Because you know, it just makes things a little bit better and a little bit better right now is a lot."

Sam Prentice, a firefighter for the USDA Forest Service battled the flames in Greenville on Aug. 5, when the town was leveled. He was not optimistic on Greenville's ability to rebuild.

"Essentially it starts to become an archaeology site — kind of a testament to the fire era that we're in right now," Prentice said. "It's daunting."

The fire had ravaged more than 800 square miles and continued to threaten more than a dozen rural and forest communities.

Northwest heat wave spurs help for the vulnerable

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Oregon volunteers scrambled to hand out water, portable fans, Popsicles and information about cooling shelters to homeless people living in isolated encampments on the outskirts of Portland as the Pacific Northwest sweated through another heat wave.

In an area more used to temperate weather, authorities are trying to provide relief to the vulnerable, including low-income older people and those living outdoors. They are mindful of a record-shattering heat wave in late June that killed hundreds in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia when the thermometer went as high as 116 degrees Fahrenheit.

In Portland, temperatures reached 103 F by late afternoon Thursday and more heat was expected Friday. It was hotter than Phoenix,

where the desert city hit a below-normal 100 F. In Seattle, highs were in the 90s in a region where many don't have air conditioning. In Bellingham, Wash., on Thursday the high hit 100 F for the first time on record.

In Portland, a nonprofit group that serves the homeless and those with mental illness used three large vans to transport water and other cooling items to homeless encampments along the Columbia River on the eastern outskirts of the city.

The effort was important because people experiencing homelessness are often reluctant to go to cooling centers, said Kim James, director of homeless and housing support for Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare.

The encampment, where rusted-out cars and broken-down RVs mixed with tents and piles of garbage, was in sharp contrast to downtown Portland, where sweaty pedestri-

ans cooled off by running through a large public fountain in a riverfront park.

Luna Abadia, 17, was out training with her cross country team from Lincoln High School in the morning when the group stopped for a few minutes at the fountain. The runners normally train at 4 p.m., but in recent weeks, they have had to shift it to 8 a.m. — and it's still oppressively hot, she said.

"It was very hot, lots of sweat. That's something we've noticed in the past week or so," Abadia said.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has declared a state of emergency and activated an emergency operations center, citing the potential for disruptions to the power grid and transportation. City and county governments have opened cooling centers, extended public library hours and waived bus fare for those headed to cooling centers.

Strengthening Fred set to reach Florida by Saturday

Associated Press

HAVANA — Tropical depression Fred was slowly strengthening and had the potential to regain tropical storm status sometime on Friday, ahead of its projected track towards the Florida Keys and southwest Florida, forecasters said.

The system was dropping heavy rain over parts of Cuba in the early morning hours and

was expected to reach Florida by Saturday, the U.S. National Weather Service said.

The main threats were rain and flooding. A tropical storm warning was issued Friday morning for the Florida Keys and Florida Bay. A tropical storm watch was in place for southwest Florida and parts of Cuba.

The hurricane center said 3 to 7 inches of rain were expected across the Florida Keys

and southern peninsula by Monday, with isolated maximums of 10 inches.

The Miami-based U.S. hurricane center said Fred had maximum sustained winds of 35 mph Friday morning and was centered just north of Cuba's coast. The system was about 370 miles east-southeast of Key West, Fla. Fred was headed west-northwest at 10 mph.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man accused of tattooing child inside a McDonald's

SC LAURENS — A South Carolina man accused of tattooing a juvenile in a fast-food restaurant has been arrested and is facing charges, police said.

Brandon Presha, 28, of Laurens, was arrested Tuesday on charges of illegal tattooing and underage tattooing, Laurens Police Chief Chrissie Latimore said. The chief said a judge has set bond on both charges at \$25,000, WYFF-TV reported.

The Aug. 6 incident came to the attention of police last week after some detectives were tagged on social media posts showing video of the child being tattooed, Latimore said.

During an ensuing investigation, authorities determined Presha was the unlicensed tattoo artist and that the individual receiving the tattoo was a juvenile, Latimore said. She did not provide the child's age or elaborate.

Man pleads guilty to gender reveal explosion

NH KINGSTON — A man has pleaded guilty to a disorderly conduct charge stemming from an explosive gender reveal party that was heard by nearby residents in New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

As part of a plea deal reached Tuesday, Anthony Spinelli, of Kingston, was convicted and fined \$620, of which \$500 will be suspended for 12 months as long as he stays out of trouble, according to court records.

Police in Kingston, a town not

far from the Massachusetts state line, received reports in April of a loud explosion. They responded to a quarry, where people acknowledged holding a gender reveal party with explosives.

The explosive was 80 pounds of Tannerite, police said. The family thought the quarry would be the safest spot to detonate the explosive, which is typically sold over the counter as a target for firearms practice, police said.

Some nearby residents reported their homes were shaken by the explosion. No injuries were reported, police said.

300-wolf limit set after runaway spring hunt

WI MADISON — Wildlife officials in Wisconsin set a 300-animal limit Wednesday for the state's fall wolf hunt, exceeding biologists' recommendations as they study the impact of a rushed spring season that saw hunters take almost twice as many wolves as allotted.

State Department of Natural Resources scientists asked its policy board to cap kills at 130 animals, saying board members must be cautious because the four-day season in February took place during wolves' breeding season and the long-term ramifications on the population are unknown.

But conservative-leaning members of the board countered that the population is still well above the DNR's goal of 350 animals and they have a responsibility to manage the pack and protect livestock from wolf attacks. The board ultimately

voted 5-2 to set aside the department's recommendation and up the quota to 300 animals.

Two hikers injured in encounter with grizzly

MT HELENA — A grizzly bear injured two people in an encounter southeast of Ennis, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks reported Wednesday.

Two men were hiking with a dog off trail in the Bear Creek area around 8:30 p.m. Tuesday when they encountered a grizzly bear sow with cubs at close range. The hikers used bear spray to defend themselves. They sustained minor injuries from the encounter and were able to hike out without assistance.

Skinny House back on market, listed for \$1.2M

MA BOSTON — Boston's famous Skinny House is on sale again for a whopping \$1.2 million.

The vertically rectangular-shaped house was listed on Monday, the first time it's been on the market since 2017. Four years ago, it was sold for \$900,000, The Boston Globe reported.

The home, located in Boston's North End, is about 1,165 square feet. But more interestingly, the house is barely 10 feet wide at its widest point. The humble abode narrows in the back, ending at 9.25 feet.

There are four stories in the home and a private deck that displays views of the Boston Harbor. Also, the house offers updated appliances, hardwood

floors and exposed brick, and a Juliet balcony facing private gardens.

The home does not have a front door. Guests enter through a private side door and they're met with a somewhat full-sized kitchen and dining room.

Destroyed historical building torn down

CT NEW HARTFORD — A historical building in Connecticut was torn down Wednesday after it was destroyed in a fire that injured three firefighters and left 22 people homeless.

Crews began demolition in the morning on the three-story building in New Hartford, said Jon Barbagallo, a spokesperson for regional emergency response agencies. Cleanup of the site is expected to take up to two weeks, he said.

The blaze at New Hartford House was reported shortly before 2:30 a.m. Tuesday, leaving only part of the brick facade standing. Barbagallo said all 20 adults and two children who lived on the second and third floors were accounted for, but several pets were missing.

Three firefighters were taken to hospitals, including two who suffered minor injuries and a third who had a serious medical problem and was in critical condition Tuesday, Barbagallo said.

The cause of the blaze is under investigation.

The building dates from 1850 and had six businesses on the ground floor and 14 apartments above, officials said.

— From wire reports

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ChiSox, Yanks go deep at 'Field of Dreams'

Associated Press

As the bus carried the New York Yankees through the cornfields blanketing this serene, rolling farmland of northeast Iowa, Aaron Judge noticed a difference from the usual arrival in the next city.

The ride to the Field of Dreams site in Dyersville, Iowa, to play the Chicago White Sox on Thursday night had everyone's attention, like a bunch of kids who couldn't believe what they were getting to do.

"It was the first time people had their headphones out, and they were just glued to the windows, checking out the scenery," said Judge, the three-time All-Star right fielder.

"We have a lot of guys from different countries who really haven't seen the country like this, or guys from big cities who really haven't seen open fields and stuff like this, so it was pretty cool driving in and seeing everybody in town kind of standing on the side of the roads with signs and cheering us on," he said.

The made-for-TV event, delayed by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, had the billing as the first Major League Baseball game in this state that's usually focused on college and community sports, spotlighted by presidential campaigns and

fueled by the hog and grain industry.

Judge provided a pair of picture-perfect images, launching two long drives into the cornstalks. Tim Anderson hit the eighth homer of the game, a two-run liner in the ninth inning that lifted the White Sox over the Yankees in a 9-8 thriller.

Anderson delivered a Hollywood ending, too, circling the bases as fireworks exploded. So what if it was more from "The Natural" than "Field of Dreams"?

This won't be a one-time visit, either. Commissioner Rob Manfred confirmed that the Field of Dreams game will return in August 2022, with the teams to be determined.

The made-from-scratch stadium — built to hold about 8,000 fans who watched the White Sox and Yankees play in one of the most anticipated mid-August games in history — was placed next to the actual diamond where the 1989 movie starring Kevin Costner was shot outside the town of Dyersville, population 4,000.

Costner came back for this, stealing the scene with a slow, ponderous stroll into the outfield his character Ray Kinsella often took in the film before stopping to watch the real White Sox and Yankees emerge from the corn for pregame introductions.

Clutching a ball in his hand, while the original symphonic score from the movie played over the loudspeakers, Costner stepped up to a microphone and told the crowd, "It's perfect."

White Sox slugger Jose Abreu delivered an instant highlight in the first inning, hitting a line drive that zipped over the fence in left field and vanished into the corn.

Judge connected for a three-run smash in the third and a two-run drive in the ninth. Neither was a can of corn — they both flew far.

There were rows upon rows of corn between the two outfields, in fact. Yes, it's the same spot where Shoeless Joe Jackson and his pals appeared — and disappeared — throughout the Academy Award-nominated film about fathers, children, culture, self-discovery, ghosts and, oh, yeah, baseball.

"As a kid you dream of the chance to play Major League Baseball and you watch certain movies or heroes in comic books and fairy tales, and getting a chance to actually be at the Field of Dreams and play a game here and have family and friends here and getting a chance to represent the Yankees here, never in my life did I think I'd ever experience this," Judge said.

Ohtani gets better of Vlad Jr., Angels down Blue Jays

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Shohei Ohtani grinned and laughed after Vladimir Guerrero Jr. bounced a single to left field in the Toronto slugger's first career plate appearance against the Angels' two-way superstar.

When he struck out Guerrero with a wicked slider two innings later, Ohtani smiled and chuckled at that one, too.

Ohtani had plenty of fun in his first mound meeting with most likely his strongest competitor for the AL MVP award. He also did plenty against the rest of the Blue Jays to secure another win for the Los Angeles Angels.

Ohtani pitched six innings of three-hit ball to win his third consecutive start, and he also doubled and scored an early run in the Angels' 6-3 victory Thursday night.

Although Ohtani (7-1) issued

three walks for the first time since June and threw two wild pitches in his 17th mound start of the season, he allowed just two runs and struck out six to keep his ERA at 2.93.

Athletics 17, Indians 0: Mitch Moreland homered twice, Chris Bassitt posted his AL-leading 12th win and visiting Oakland routed Cleveland for its seventh straight victory.

Brewers 17, Cubs 4: Luis Urias tied a major league record with five extra-base hits and Manny Pina drove in six runs as visiting Milwaukee routed Chicago.

Phillies 2, Dodgers 1: Bryce Harper homered, Ian Kennedy escaped a bases-loaded jam in the ninth inning and host Philadelphia ended Los Angeles' four-game winning streak.

Reds 12, Braves 2: Jesse Winker hit a grand slam in the

second inning and visiting Cincinnati added four more homers in a win over Atlanta that snapped a three-game skid.

Mariners 3, Rangers 1: Marco Gonzales pitched a two-hitter, J.P. Crawford and Jake Fraley homered and host Seattle beat Texas.

Mets 4-5, Nationals 1-4: Pete Alonso hit a game-ending homer with one out in the seventh inning and host New York recovered from a blown lead to sweep its doubleheader against Washington.

The Mets won the opener 4-1 as Brandon Nimmo homered and drove in four runs and Marcus Stroman took a shutout into the sixth.

Cardinals 7, Pirates 6: Six St. Louis relievers combined to allow three runs in seven innings, and Paul DeJong and Lars Nootbaar homered to complete a three-

game sweep of host Pittsburgh.

Tigers 6, Orioles 4: Renato Nunez homered in his return to his former home, and Detroit dealt host Baltimore its eighth straight loss as Miguel Cabrera sat out while one homer shy of 500.

Rays 8, Red Sox 1: Wander Franco hit a tiebreaking two-run homer in the sixth inning, Drew Rasmussen threw four strong innings in a spot start and visiting Tampa Bay added to its lead in the AL East with a win over Boston.

Giants 7, Rockies 0: LaMonte Wade Jr. hit a three-run homer and MLB-leading San Francisco beat visiting Colorado for its fifth straight win.

Diamondbacks 12, Padres 3: Yu Darvish left a rocky start early with lower back tightness, and host Arizona took advantage to beat San Diego.

49ers excited for Lance's preseason debut

Associated Press

Coach Kyle Shanahan knows that in the big picture, it won't matter how well Trey Lance plays in his exhibition debut for the San Francisco 49ers.

That doesn't dampen Shanahan's excitement to see his rookie first-round quarterback take the field in a game for the first time Saturday night when the Niners host the Kansas City Chiefs in an exhibition game.

"It's fun to watch quarterbacks go out there for the first time," Shanahan said Thursday. "But I don't get nervous for the person or anything like that. It's fun to watch. I know no one's going to remember how his first preseason game is, but they will the next day. That's all right. I know rookies get some butterflies. It is a big deal for them. But the reality of it is it is an experience for them. I think Trey is going to make the team so he doesn't have to go out there and just freak out about that. But he knows a lot of eyes will be on him."

A lot of eyes have been on Lance ever since the 49ers drafted him in April after trading three first-round picks for the No. 3

selection.

San Francisco is working Lance in gradually behind starter Jimmy Garoppolo but the rookie has impressed during training camp.

But there are some things he can't truly experience until game action, like how to deal with getting the play call from the sideline in a loud stadium and how to make the decision about when to slide, dive headfirst, go out of bounds or take a hit when scrambling.

Shanahan wants Lance to stay on his feet on scrambles in practice to avoid any chance of an injury but drills him afterward on what he would have done in a real game. He's been pleased with the answers so far but now gets to see it for real.

"That's something that we'll all see in the game," he said. "Trey says the right things, he's a pretty good runner, he's pretty competitive. I hope he takes my word for it. Sometimes those guys don't believe how hard people hit until they get a couple of times in the NFL."

The preseason may be more important for Lance because of how little experience

he had in college. He started only 17 games at FCS-level North Dakota State and played only one game in a COVID-shortened 2020 season.

His last game with fans in the stadium came more than 19 months ago against James Madison in the FCS title game for the 2019 season.

That only adds to his level of anticipation for this game.

"Excited to go out and compete with this locker room of guys," he said. "Everything's new, so just being able to get used to everything, everything from the hotel the night before the game to pregame warmup. Everything's going to be new, but at the same time football is football."

The 49ers have been very pleased with what they have seen from Lance so far, reinforcing their strong belief in him from the draft process.

Notes: Shanahan said he will hold several players out of the game, including DE Nick Bosa, DE Dee Ford and WR Jalen Hurd. ... CB K'Waun Williams (hip) and DE Arden Key (quadriceps) missed practice and are day to day.

Colts, Panthers face first tests at joint practice

Associated Press

WESTFIELD, Ind. — Indianapolis quarterbacks Jacob Eason and Sam Ehlinger finally got to throw some passes against a different defense Thursday.

Sam Darnold faced the first real challenge with his new Carolina teammates, too.

After finishing the first of two joint practices at Colts training camp it's clear everybody has some finetuning to do before Sunday's preseason opener.

"They're an 11-5 team, they were a playoff team last year, so I guess that's one of the reasons we wanted to come here," Panthers coach Matt Rhule said. "We want to see how far away we are from them."

Rhule wasn't impressed with the Panthers' slow start but applauded the team's reaction by picking up the pace later and perhaps setting up a better workout Friday.

But this week will largely be graded on the quarterback play.

Both teams made big offseason moves to acquire what they hope will be foundational pieces.

Carolina obtained Darnold in a deal with the New York Jets, who swapped first-round picks with the Colts in 2018 to take the former Southern California star No. 3 overall. Darnold is trying to revive his career after going 13-25 with the Jets, and the long weekend in Indy started with mixed results.

While he scrambled to extend plays, he also missed receivers down the field, and the drops didn't help.

"There's also a lot of plays our tight ends left out there today, too, and you can't always tell it, but we're not probably where we're supposed to be, and when the play's not there, Sam's got to turn and throw the ball away," Rhule said. "All of

us have got to be a little better in the passing game tomorrow."

Meanwhile, the Colts found themselves working in two youngsters.

Carson Wentz, the projected starter after a trade with Philadelphia, hasn't practiced in almost two weeks because of an injured left foot. Wentz was walking around on the field with a mask — and no protective gear around the surgically repaired foot.

Team owner Jim Irsay told reporters the Colts would be cautious with Wentz for the Sept. 12 season opener against Seattle.

"In talking with Carson, I told him 'Look, you have to be right. We need you to be 100%, don't rush it,'" Irsay said. "He's a competitor, but I told him don't come back until you're truly, truly ready."

If Wentz doesn't play against the Seahawks, Irsay believes

the likely replacement may already be in camp.

The strong-armed Eason is in his second season out of Washington, but his rookie year was a washout. Joint practices and the preseason were canceled, and as No. 3 on the depth chart he never took a regular-season snap. When Wentz went down, the former Washington star initially inherited the No. 1 job.

But he's been splitting reps this week with rookie Ehlinger, a sixth-round draft pick, and that's the plan for Friday and likely Sunday. Ehlinger is more athletic and has better touch, which were evident again Thursday.

"Both Sam and Jacob, I thought, were really solid," coach Frank Reich said. "They both had touchdown passes in that last period. I just felt like there was some pretty good execution, all things considered. It was their first go-round ... going against an NFL defense."

Baylor moving forward after NCAA penalties

Associated Press

Dave Aranda became Baylor's coach about 19 months ago knowing that NCAA penalties were coming for a scandal that embroiled the football program long before he arrived.

It had been much longer for athletic director Mack Rhoades, who found "an institution and athletics department in turmoil" when he took over five years ago in the wake of the revelation of a sprawling sexual assault scandal that cost two-time Big 12 champion coach Art Briles his job.

With the NCAA case against the Bears finally resolved, and without any major program-crushing penalties, they can move forward without that lingering unknown.

"It's been hanging around. It's been a black cloud since I arrived on this campus," Rhoades said. "We're glad to have some closure and to be able to look forward and move forward. And again, remember our mistakes, learn

from our mistakes, learn from our past. And then we'll navigate whatever comes in front of us."

With no players or coaches remaining from Briles' tenure, Baylor was placed on four years of probation, but could still play in a postseason bowl game. There will be recruiting restrictions in place for Aranda and his staff during the 2021-22 academic year, including a reduction of 30 official visits and a three-week ban on unofficial visits.

The penalties could have been much worse considering the scope of the allegations, but the actual mishandling of sexual assault claims by Baylor was deemed out of the NCAA's jurisdiction.

Aranda knew about the case when he took over at Baylor in January 2020, fresh off a 15-0 national championship as LSU's defensive coordinator. He attended the school's two-day virtual hearing with NCAA officials last December, four years

after the school received a notice of inquiry from the NCAA enforcement staff.

The coach said he never thought in terms of feeling a sense of relief that the penalties weren't harsher. The survivors were the first thing he thought about when he heard this week that the penalties were forthcoming.

"I was at the trial in December, so listening to it and just hearing the details and being part of it gave me greater insight to it, and I was able to put myself in a lot of people's shoes. I spent most of my time on that," Aranda said.

The NCAA did find secondary rules violations that occurred between 2011 and 2016, including impermissible benefits for a player who failed to follow an academic performance plan following an academic violation. There were also a predominantly female student host program that improperly operated outside of recruiting protocols.

Rhoades and Aranda met

with the team on the middle of the field during practice Wednesday, after the penalties were revealed. The AD kept what was said between them private, but said he was proud of the players.

"They have been part of the culture change, each and every one of them," Rhoades said. "And not saying we're perfect, not saying they're perfect, but they have been instrumental in the culture change, the way they lead and the way they interact with one another."

Aranda described what Rhoades said as "very focused and very on point," calling it a strong moment for the team just more than three weeks before its Sept. 4 opener at Texas State.

"There's a lot of lessons to learn from it," Aranda said. "I'll continue to meet with the team as we move forward."

The Bears went 2-7 in Aranda's debut season, which came without the benefit of spring drills last year because of the pandemic.

Henley shoots 62 to sit atop Wyndham Championship

Associated Press

GREENSBORO, N.C. — Russell Henley shot an 8-under 62, his lowest round in more than two years, to take the lead Thursday in the suspended first round of the Wyndham Championship.

Henley birdied three of his final four holes for a two-stroke lead over Sung Kang, Ted Potter Jr., Chris Kirkland, Hudson Swafford, Scott Piercy and Michael Thompson in the PGA Tour's final regular-season event. Adam Hadwin also was 6-under, but had two holes left when darkness ended play.

A storm halted play for 2 hours, 7 minutes, with 22 players unable to finish. They finished the round Friday.

Past champion Webb Simpson and Kevin Kisner led a group of 10 another stroke behind at 65 at Sedgefield Country Club, where many competitors are scrambling to make it into top 125 to advance to the playoffs that start next week at the Northern Trust.

Henley, at No. 46 in the standings, had no worries about the postseason, but came out fast with a bogey-free round in chasing his first PGA Tour victory in four years.

He moved in front with a two-putt birdie on the par-5 15th before closing with birdies on 17 and 18, the last with a 20-foot putt. He had his lowest round on the tour since a career-low 61 at the John Deere Classic in 2019.

Henley has played some solid golf of late. He was tied for the 36-hole lead at the U.S. Open in June, then had two straight top-20 finishes before missing the cut at the British Open. He returned this week, hoping he can carry his strong play to the end.

"I haven't won in years, so I feel like as well as I've been playing, I feel like I've underachieved a little bit," he said.

"My mindset," Henley continued, "is I feel if I can play my game, play my normal game, then I can maybe give myself a chance and that's kind of where I'm at."

There are several big names competing

to keep their seasons alive. Adam Scott, who started at No. 121, and Matt Kuchar, at No. 124, both had strong starts at 66.

"I would like to play well this week and get a chance to play next week and keep getting my game into place," Scott said.

Rickie Fowler, who came in 130th and needing a good week, didn't help himself with a 71. Justin Rose, the Payne Stewart Award winner this week, has to finish in the top 10 to advance after coming in 138th. He opened with a 66, tied for 19th.

Masters champion Hideki Matsuyama was at 69, tied for 89th.

Olympic medalists Rory Sabbatini and C.T. Pan also are playing after the Tokyo Games. Sabbatini, who took silver for Slovakia behind U.S. gold medal winner Xander Schauffele, started with a 66.

Pan, from Taiwan, won a seven-man playoff for the bronze. He shot a 68.

Louis Oosthuizen, the only top 10 player in the FedEx standings entered, withdrew because of a neck injury.