

Taliban violently dispel rare strife

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban violently broke up a protest in eastern Afghanistan on Wednesday, killing at least one person as they quashed a rare public show of dissent. The militant group meanwhile met with former officials from the toppled Western-backed government.

As officials work to shape a future government, the United Arab Emirates acknowledged that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, who fled the Taliban advance, and his family were in that country.

The Taliban's every action in their sudden sweep to power is being watched closely. They insist they have changed and won't impose the same draconian restrictions they did when they last ruled Afghanistan, all but eliminating women's rights, carrying out public executions and harboring al-Qaida in the years before the 9/11 attacks.

But many Afghans remain deeply skeptical, and the violent response to Wednesday's protest could only fuel their fears. Thousands are racing to the airport and borders to flee the country. Many others are hiding inside their homes, fearful after prisons and armories were emptied during the insurgents' blitz across the country.

Dozens of people gathered in the eastern city of Jalalabad to raise the national flag a day before Afghanistan's Independence Day, which commemorates the end of British rule in 1919. They lowered the Taliban flag — a white banner with an Islamic inscription — that the militants

have raised in the areas they captured.

Video footage later showed the Taliban firing into the air and attacking people with batons to disperse the crowd. Babrak Amirzada, a reporter for a local news agency, said he and a TV cameraman from another agency were beaten by the Taliban as they tried to cover the unrest.

A local health official said at least one person was killed and six wounded. The official was not authorized to speak to media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Meanwhile, videos from the Panjshir Valley north of Kabul, a stronghold of the Northern Alliance militias that allied with the United States against the Taliban in 2001, appear to show potential opposition figures gathering there. It's in the only province that hasn't yet fallen to the Taliban.

Those figures include members of the deposed government — Vice President Amrullah Saleh, who asserted on Twitter that he is the country's rightful president — and Defense Minister Gen. Bismillah Mohammadi, as well as Ahmad Massoud, the son of the slain Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud. It's unclear if they intend to challenge the Taliban, who seized most of the country in a matter of days last week.

The Taliban, meanwhile, pressed ahead with their efforts to form an "inclusive, Islamic government." They have been holding talks with former Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, a senior official in the ousted government.

Watchdog: 'Victorious US withdrawal' out of Afghanistan impossible

BY SARAH CAMMARATA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A "victorious U.S. withdrawal" from Afghanistan was impossible to achieve because the U.S. government created unrealistic timelines to rebuild the country, leading to short-term fixes such as injections of troops, money and resources, according to the watchdog agency created by Congress to provide oversight.

U.S. officials also pushed their own political aims without taking into account what was achievable, a report released Tuesday by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, or SIGAR, concluded in its final "lessons learned." By relying on quick-fix solutions, U.S. programs ultimately worsened the issues that they were meant to address.

"By design, these timelines often ignored conditions on the ground and forced reckless compromises in U.S. programs, creating perverse incentives to spend quickly and focus on short-term, unsustainable goals that could not create the conditions to allow a victorious U.S. withdrawal," according to the report.

The United States continued to draw down troops and resources, despite recognizing the Afghan government's failure to address its instability, the report said.

The government's unrealistic timelines — devised on the "mistaken" belief that the choices in Washington could "transform the calculus of complex Afghan institutions, powerbrokers and communities

contested by the Taliban" — is one of seven lessons explained in the report that the U.S. must learn after almost two decades of war.

Since Congress created SIGAR in the fiscal 2009 National Defense Authorization Act to provide independent oversight on the billions of dollars appropriated for Afghanistan's reconstruction, the inspector general has systematically detailed years of waste, corruption and fraud. In the agency's last quarterly report, SIGAR chief John Sopko provided a grim outlook on the future of a country that the U.S. has spent 20 years and \$145 billion trying to rebuild. The Defense Department has also spent an additional \$837 billion on warfighting, during which 2,443 American troops and 1,144 allied troops have been killed and 20,666 U.S. troops injured, according to the report.

On Sunday, Taliban fighters poured into Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul, ending the Afghan government's rule of the country and signaling the final stage of the U.S. involvement there.

The Taliban's swift takeover of the country in recent days is not surprising, Sopko told NPR. For the last 10 years, SIGAR has shone a light on the Afghan National Security Forces' weaknesses.

"I think the speed maybe is a little bit of a surprise. But the fact that the [Afghan National Defense and Security Forces] could not fight on their own should not have been a surprise to anyone," he said Monday on NPR.

DODEA: Masks needed inside at all schools

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany—Face masks will be required indoors when the new year for Defense Department schools begins Monday, including for students and teachers who are already vaccinated against the coronavirus, school and military officials said.

Masks also will be mandatory on school buses, where seating charts will be used to assist with contact tracing, school administrators said.

"In the interest of keeping everyone safe, all folks in buildings will be masked, including teachers," said Jason Ter Horst, DODEA community superintendent of Baumholder, Sembach and Wiesbaden schools, at a U.S. Army Garrison Rheinland-Pfalz online town hall meeting Tuesday.

Face masks also were required indoors at all DODEA schools last year.

The rules are based on DOD and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance, school officials said.

The CDC earlier this month updated its masking guidance for K-12 schools due to the spread of the highly contagious delta variant. It recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students and visitors.

Students will be given frequent

outdoor mask breaks and can take their masks off when eating and drinking while spaced a safe distance apart, Ter Horst said.

"We understand that no one wants to wear masks all day," he said. "Kids want to do whatever it takes to be in school. We couldn't do this without them."

The issue of whether face coverings should be optional or mandatory in U.S. public school districts has sharply divided many parents and policymakers—divisions that arose on the garrison's Facebook page, which live-streamed the meeting.

"I appreciate you all using the science and data to support our kids and families," a viewer com-

mented online.

But one parent asked, "What if we don't want our kids to be masked all day at school?"

"You can always home school," a commenter suggested in response.

Ter Horst called some changes for this year "bright spots," including more lenient physical distancing rules in the classroom—3 feet instead of 6 feet. Also, volunteers will be allowed in classrooms on a limited basis.

Parents are being asked to check students' temperatures and basic health daily, Ter Horst said. A child with a fever or other symptoms should stay at home. The absence will be excused.

Cobra blood off of US soldiers' training menu

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

The animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals declared victory this week after the practice of drinking the blood of cobras was axed from the multinational Cobra Gold military exercise in Thailand.

Killing the snakes to demonstrate a jungle survival technique was scuttled at the exercise earlier this month, PETA announced Monday, citing unnamed Thai military sources. The nonprofit, based in Norfolk, Va., spent years lobbying against a practice it called "frat boy-style barbarity."

Images of beheaded snakes, their blood dripping onto the tongues of eager young Marines, were publicized by the Defense Department itself.

"We are proud that after PETA's intensive campaigning, Thai and U.S. armed forces made the ethical and safe decision to not kill any animals dur-

ing this year's Cobra Gold exercises, apparently for the first time in the event's history," PETA vice president of international laboratory methods Shalin Gala wrote in an email Wednesday to Stars and Stripes. "This move means that this year, troops were no longer made to eat live animals or drink the blood of beheaded snakes, which is a win-win, sparing animals and protecting public health."

The III Marine Expeditionary Force, which is based in Okinawa, Japan, and usually participates in Cobra Gold, did not respond to an email seeking comment Wednesday.

Gala said the group was concerned about the poor treatment of animals, but also about the health of the service members.

The practice poses "a serious zoonotic disease threat," a group of 19 military veterans and PETA supporters wrote to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on July 22.

Flights leaving Kabul for Afghan evacuees continue

Staff and wire reports

As the United States seeks to evacuate some 5,000 people a day from Kabul, the challenge of getting out of Afghanistan is getting into the airfield, which is secured in separate areas by both U.S. and Taliban forces.

U.S. government-provided flights are departing, and American citizens and permanent residents "should consider traveling to Hamid Karzai International Airport," the State Department said in an alert Wednesday afternoon.

But the message carried a warning that the U.S. government cannot ensure safe passage to the airport.

The military side of the facility is being secured by thousands of Americans. Outside, Taliban militants had set up checkpoints and were demanding travel documents before letting anyone in, said a former airport worker who was waiting to be called back to his job and declined to be named for safety reasons.

The militants fired occasional warning shots to disperse crowds of people who sought to push through the gate into the airport each time it opened even an inch, The Associated Press reported.

But in meetings with the group's senior leadership in Qatar over the weekend, U.S. Central Command leader Gen. Frank McKenzie cautioned that any attack on the evacuation effort would be met with "overwhelming force," he said in a statement Tuesday after touring the airfield.

Since those meetings, U.S. commanders have had discussions with Taliban commanders on the ground outside the airport, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Tuesday.

"I would just let the results speak for themselves," Kirby said. "There are interactions multiple times a day and ... there's been no hostile interactions from the Taliban to our operations at the airport."

Texas governor tests positive for virus

Associated Press

AUSTIN — Texas Gov. Greg Abbott tested positive for COVID-19 on Tuesday, according to his office, who said the Republican is in good health and experiencing no symptoms.

Abbott, who was vaccinated in December and has refused calls to reinstate mask mandates as the highly contagious delta variant surges in Texas, was isolating in the governor's mansion in Austin and receiving monoclonal antibody treatment, spokesman Mark Miner said in a statement. He is at least the 11th governor to test positive since the pandemic began, according to a tally by The Associated Press.

"Governor Abbott is fully vaccinated against COVID-19, in good health and currently experiencing no symptoms. Everyone that the Governor has been in close contact with today has been notified," Miner said.

In a video posted on social media, Abbott said that being fully vaccinated "may be one reason I'm really not feeling any symptoms right now. I have no fever, no aches and pains, no other types of symptoms."

The positive test comes a day after Abbott, who has seldom been seen wearing a mask in public recently, did not wear one while speaking indoors near Dallas to a crowded room of GOP supporters, most of

whom were older and unmasked. Video posted by his campaign shows the 63-year-old governor — who is up for reelection in 2022 and has drawn two GOP challengers who have attacked the virus restrictions he put in place last year — mingling with attendees as they gathered around him taking pictures.

The event was held by a group called the Republican Club at Heritage Ranch. Reached by phone Tuesday after Abbott announced he had tested positive, Jack DeSimone, president of the club, said he did not like "to have conversations like this" and declined to comment further on Abbott's appearance.

Fred shuts down highways with mudslides, floods

Associated Press

Tropical Depression Fred swirled over West Virginia early Wednesday and dumped heavy rain over the northeastern U.S., threatening to unleash mudslides and flash floods in upstate New York after closing interstate highways in the lower Appalachians. Tornado watches remained in effect for mountainous areas of Virginia and the Carolinas.

Unconfirmed tornadoes unleashed by the stormy weather already caused damage in places in Georgia and North Carolina on Tuesday as Fred moved north, well inland from the coastal areas that usually bear the brunt of tropical weather. One death was reported — a Las Vegas man whose car hydro-

planed and flipped into a ditch near Panama City, Fla., hours after the storm moved ashore, Florida Highway Patrol said.

About 25,000 customers were without power early Wednesday according to the utility tracker poweroutage.us, most of them in West Virginia and North Carolina, where steady downpours swelled waterways and washed rocks and mud onto highways. Multiple landslides closed Interstate 19 through the Nantahala Gorge, according to the North Carolina transportation department.

The National Hurricane Center said Fred had top sustained winds of 25 mph and was moving northeast past Charleston, W.Va., at 20 mph Wednesday morning.

As many as 14 possible tornadoes were re-

ported across Georgia and the Carolinas on Tuesday, according to the weather service. Transylvania County, N.C., declared a state of emergency after 10 inches fell, sending mud and rock onto highways, flooding roads and destroying at least one home.

Meanwhile, Tropical Storm Grace was strengthening after unleashing torrential rain on earthquake-damaged Haiti. Grace's sustained winds grew to 65 mph early Wednesday as it moved between southeastern Cuba and Jamaica, and could be a hurricane before hitting Mexico's Yucatan peninsula late Wednesday or early Thursday.

Tropical Storm Henri, meanwhile, was about 160 miles south-southwest of Bermuda.

Wildfires continue advancing through Northern Calif.

Associated Press

GRIZZLY FLATS — Northern California wildfires that incinerated two mountain communities continued marching through the Sierra Nevada on Wednesday while a utility purposely blacked out as many as 51,000 customers to prevent new blazes.

Two weeks after the Dixie Fire destroyed most of the Gold Rush-era town of Greenville, the Caldor Fire a few miles southeast exploded through tinder-dry trees and ravaged Grizzly Flats, a forest community of around 1,200 people.

Fire officials estimated that at least 50 homes had burned in the area since the fire erupted Saturday and two people were hospitalized with serious injuries.

Gov. Gavin Newsom proclaimed a state of emergency in El Dorado County, where authorities were considering closing the entire El Dorado National Forest.

"We know this fire has done things that nobody could have predicted, but that's how firefighting has been in the state this year," El Dorado National Forest Supervisor Chief Jeff Marsolais said at a briefing.

Both fires grew by tens of thousands of acres from Monday afternoon through Tuesday, torching trees and burning up brush left tinder-dry by high temperatures, low humidity and drought. Afternoon gusts drove the flames.

Few homes were left standing in Grizzly Flats, where streets were littered with

downed power lines and poles. Houses were reduced to smoldering ash and twisted metal with only chimneys rising above the ruins. A post office and elementary school were also destroyed.

Derek Shaves, who had evacuated late Monday, said he visited the town Tuesday and saw that his home and most of the houses in his neighborhood had been destroyed.

"It's a pile of ash," he said.

Late Tuesday, Pacific Gas & Electric said it has begun shutting off power to as many as 51,000 customers in 18 Northern California counties to prevent wildfires for the first time since last year's historically bad fire season.

Mustang roundups in West fuel policy debate

Associated Press

TOOELE, Utah—The sound of the helicopter propeller thundered across the horizon as it dipped down toward mustangs dotting the golden brown plain. The horses burst into a gallop at the machine's approach, their high-pitched whinnies rising into the dry air.

That helicopter roundup in the mountains of western Utah removed hundreds of free-roaming wild horses, shortly before the Biden administration announced it would sharply increase the number of mustangs removed across the region. It's an emergency step land managers say is essential to preserving the ecosystem and the horses as a megadrought worsened by climate change grips the region.

"What were seeing here in the West gives some insight into a new norm," Terry Messmer, a professor at Utah State University who studies wild horse management.

The removals are adding fuel to longstanding conflicts with activists for the animals whose beauty and power make them an enduring emblem of the American West. They say the U.S. government is using the drought as an excuse to take out horses in favor of cattle grazing.

Horses that are captured are held in government corrals and pastures mostly in the West and Midwest before they are made available for public adoption. Some also end up being used by law enforcement entities such as the U.S. Border Patrol, or go to prison inmate programs where they are tamed for future use.

Advocates tried unsuccessfully to stop the roundup of Utah's Onaqui herd, one that's captured the imagination of celebrities and Girl Scout troops alike. Horses in the picturesque and accessible herd are so well known that many have names, like the patriarch "Old Man." He was left behind in the July roundup, but about 300

other horses were taken to be adopted or kept in captivity for the rest of their lives.

"It's really unfortunate the Biden administration continues to scapegoat the horses while giving a pass to livestock that have a greater impact on public lands," said Suzanne Roy, executive director of the American Wild Horse Campaign.

The Bureau of Land Management is planning to remove some 6,000 horses, mostly from Nevada, Oregon, Wyoming and Colorado, by October — a 50% increase from last year. Eventually land managers say they need to cut the number of wild horses by two-thirds to keep things in balance.

The Biden administration has announced reforms aimed at ensuring that captured horses put up for adoption do not eventually end up in slaughterhouses, but advocates worry problems could persist as long as the government offers a \$1,000 adoption incentive.

Wild-horse advocates acknowledge that lack of forage and water can be an issue, but they argue removals from the herds like the Onaqui are unnecessary. They want to leave the horses on the range and instead administer fertility treatments to limit the size of the herd.

Cattle ranchers, meanwhile, say they've made voluntary changes to reduce grazing on federal lands. By hauling water to drought-stricken areas for their livestock, they've helped horses who drink it too, said Hunter Ihrman, a spokesman for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

The number of sheep and cattle that graze on leased public land is far larger than the number of wild horses, Messmer said. A key difference, though, is that livestock are part of the U.S. economy.

"Americans like their McDonald's burgers. They like their Big Macs. They like all of those things, and all of those things have beef as part of it," he said.

House Dems plan a budget vote that moderates oppose

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Top Democrats plan House votes next week on a budget resolution that could clear a path for future passage of a \$3.5 trillion, 10-year social and environment package, suggesting a showdown ahead with rebellious party moderates.

Nine centrists have threatened to vote against their own party's budget blueprint, enough to defeat it in the closely divided House. They want the chamber to first approve a separate \$1 trillion bill financing highway, water supply and other infrastructure projects, their top priority.

House leaders made clear Tuesday that's not their plan.

Instead, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said in a conference call among House Democrats that he'd like the chamber

to approve the budget resolution next Tuesday, according to a participant in the call who spoke on condition of anonymity.

If all Republicans oppose the budget as expected, Democrats could lose no more than three of their own votes and prevail. The budget's congressional approval would prevent Republicans from killing the subsequent \$3.5 trillion bill via Senate filibusters.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi also made clear that a final vote on the public works bill would wait until the larger measure progresses. In a letter to fellow Democrats late Tuesday, she said the House must pass the budget blueprint "immediately" or endanger "the once-in-a-generation opportunity we face to enact initiatives that meet the needs of working families at this crucial time."

Data of more than 40 million exposed in T-Mobile breach

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The names, Social Security numbers and information from driver's licenses or other identification of just over 40 million former and prospective customers that applied for T-Mobile credit were exposed in a recent data breach, the company said Wednesday.

The same data for about 7.8 million current T-Mobile postpaid customers appears to be compromised. No phone numbers, account numbers, PINs, passwords, or financial information from the nearly 50 million records and accounts were compromised, it said.

T-Mobile also confirmed that approximately 850,000 active T-Mobile prepaid customer names, phone numbers and account PINs were exposed. The company said it reset all of the PINs on

those accounts. No Metro by T-Mobile, former Sprint prepaid, or Boost customers had their names or PINs exposed.

The announcement comes two days after T-Mobile said it was investigating a leak of its data after someone took to an online forum offering to sell the personal information of cellphone users. The company said Monday that it had confirmed there was unauthorized access to "some T-Mobile data" and that it had closed the entry point used to gain access.

The company said it will immediately offer two years of free identity protection services and is recommending that all of its postpaid customers change their PIN. Its investigation is ongoing.

Bellevue, Wash.-based T-Mobile became one of the country's largest cellphone service carriers after buying rival Sprint.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Gator handler recovering after attack and rescue

UT SALT LAKE CITY — A Utah reptile center employee is recovering after an alligator yanked her into its enclosure during a presentation, thrashing her around before a fast-acting visitor leaped inside and helped free her from its jaws.

Video taken by a guest shows an unidentified handler at Scales & Tails Utah, in suburban Salt Lake City, talking to some adults and children about the alligator when it bit her hand and dragged her into the water.

After pulling the handler into its pen, the alligator began whipping around and kept its jaws clamped on her.

One of the guests, later identified as Donnie Wiseman, yelled "We've got trouble in here!" before jumping into the water and climbing on top of the reptile.

Wiseman got the alligator pinned, and the handler calmly gave him and another man, Todd Christopher, instructions to help her escape from the pool. Wiseman stayed on top of the reptile until after the woman was free.

Business owners have complained of trash fire

IA JOHNSTON — Some businesses in the Des Moines suburb of Johnston are complaining about smoke and ash billowing from a trash pile in the city that's been burning for more than 10 days.

The fire has been burning a massive pile of construction materials, mulch and trees in front of Tyler Excavating for nearly two weeks, since Aug. 6, televi-

sion station KCCI reported.

The Johnston-Grimes Metropolitan Fire Department is equally unhappy with the fire. It's been called out about a dozen times to extinguish fires that continue to erupt in the pile, and crews have used more 500,000 gallons of water on the fire, Fire Chief Jim Clark said.

The city has issued notice to Tyler Excavating that the pile must be removed, and officials said the business has been cooperating.

Man flees after crashing car, fighting off trooper

FL ORLANDO — Authorities were searching for a man who fled into the woods after crashing his car and fighting a Florida Highway Patrol trooper near Orlando.

The driver got into an altercation with a trooper who responded to the scene, according to Lt. Kim Montes.

The man was able to fight off the trooper and run into the woods, she said. The trooper was taken to the hospital with minor injuries.

The highway patrol and the Orange County Sheriff's Office began searching for the man, but he had not been spotted by late morning, Montes said. She advised drivers to use caution in the area until the man is captured.

A second child has now been bitten by a coyote

MA ARLINGTON — A 5-year-old boy playing in a sandbox in a suburban Boston yard was bitten on the leg by a coyote, the second time in a week a young child in

Massachusetts was attacked by one of the animals.

He was taken to the hospital with injuries not considered life-threatening, the statement said.

Authorities, including state environmental police, searched for the coyote but were unable to immediately locate it.

Previously, a young child was bitten by a coyote on a Provincetown beach within the Cape Cod National Seashore. The coyote was shot and killed by park rangers, and tested negative for rabies.

5 firefighters injured when floor collapses

IN INDIANAPOLIS — Five Indianapolis firefighters were hospitalized with injuries after they fell through the floor of a burning home while responding to a fire later ruled an arson, officials said.

The firefighters were on the vacant home's second floor when the floor collapsed beneath them and they fell about 10 feet to the first floor, landing near the building's front door, said Battalion Chief Rita Reith of the Indianapolis Fire Department.

The firefighters were hospitalized but Reith said that all five had been released from the hospital and were recovering at home, The Indianapolis Star reported.

Man sentenced to life in wallet theft released

LA NEW ORLEANS — A Louisiana man sentenced to life without parole for stealing a wallet is free after serving 12 years.

New Orleans prosecutors

agreed to dismiss a habitual offender sentencing enhancement against Henry Phillips, 65, and he was released, The Times-Picayune/New Orleans Advocate reported.

Phillips was convicted in 2009 of purse-snatching after prosecutors said he swiped a man's wallet from a McDonald's counter and then pretended to have a gun when he was confronted. He stole \$20 before he was arrested half a block away.

Prosecutors under former District Attorney Leon Cannizzaro invoked his two prior robbery convictions to give him a sentence of mandatory life without parole, according to The Times-Picayune/New Orleans Advocate.

Searchers find body of hiker missing 2 years

WA MOUNT VERNON — The body of a 28-year-old hiker who went missing in the North Cascades nearly two years ago was found by a private search and rescue group.

Rachel Lakoduk, of Moses Lake, went missing Oct. 17, 2019, after telling her family she planned to hike the Hidden Lake Trail to a lookout cabin and spend the night, KING5 reported.

During the initial search for Lakoduk, her vehicle was found at the trailhead. Search crews, however, reported that it didn't appear she had made it to the lookout tower.

Lakoduk's mother, Elizabeth Tripp, posted on Facebook Monday morning: "Our beloved Rachel's remains arrived off the mountain yesterday."

— From wire reports

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and Military News

Yanks pass Boston for wild-card lead

Associated Press

NEW YORK — It took the New York Yankees just over six weeks to erase a 10 ½-game gap between them and the Boston Red Sox.

With roughly six more weeks left in the regular season, the longtime rivals are practically in a dead heat — although it sure feels like the Yankees are getting a running start going into the home stretch.

Luis Gil posted his third straight scoreless start to begin his career, Luke Voit and Giancarlo Stanton homered, and New York beat Boston 2-0 Tuesday night to sweep a double-header and move percentage points ahead of the Red Sox for an AL wild-card spot.

In the opener, Jonathan Loaisiga stranded the bases loaded in Boston's final at-bat for a gutsy two-inning save after the Yankees capitalized on a wild outing by Red Sox relievers for a 5-3 victory.

New York has won five straight and 12 of 15 to narrowly overtake Boston for second in the AL East — the Yankees are 68-52 and the Red Sox 69-53, a difference of 0.001 percentage points. New York was 10 ½ games behind first-place Boston on July 5 but has gone 26-11 since.

"It's going to be a tough road ahead still, but the group is a confident group, and I think they know what they're capable of," Yankees manager Aaron

Boone said.

New York is in a playoff position for the first time since May 30.

"That's a different team than early in the season," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "They're more agile, more versatile, more athletic and one thing they've done throughout the season is they can pitch."

Boston had seemingly snapped out of a 3-11 slump when it swept last-place Baltimore for three games over the weekend. Now, Boston is suddenly out of postseason position after leading the division for much of the season.

"It's not deflating," Cora said. "I mean, it's two games, we lost, whatever."

Gil allowed three hits and four walks and struck out four over 4 ⅔ innings. He has yet to allow a run in 15 ⅔ big league innings, the longest stretch to start a career by a Yankees pitcher since at least 1961, according to Elias. The previous best was Joba Chamberlain at 15 ⅓ innings in 2007.

"That's a big game out there," Boone said. "Red Sox-Yankees in August, playing for a lot, and I thought he was unflappable."

Gil is the only major league pitcher since at least 1901 with no runs allowed and 15 or more strikeouts through his first three games, according to YES Network.

"A lot of adrenaline tonight," he said via translator.

Hendricks earns 14th victory, halts Cubs' 12-game skid

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Kyle Hendricks became the first 14-game winner in the majors, Ian Happ homered and the Chicago Cubs snapped a 12-game losing streak with a 2-1 win over the Cincinnati Reds on Tuesday night.

Hendricks (14-5) gave up three hits in six innings — the only big one a two-out homer by Nick Castellanos in the sixth — as Chicago won for the first time since Aug. 4 in Colorado. The Cubs are 3-15 since selling off their biggest stars at the trade deadline last month.

Frank Schwindel had a run-scoring double for the Cubs in the third. Happ homered to right field leading off the sixth, one of his three hits.

Codi Heuer retired Cincinnati in order in the eighth and ninth for his second major league save and first this season.

Reds rookie Vladimir Gutiérrez (8-4) gave up nine hits while striking out seven over 6 ⅓ innings.

Giants 3, Mets 2: Tommy La Stella hit a two-run homer in the first inning to back Logan Webb's sixth straight win, and host San Francisco dealt fading New York its fifth straight loss.

Diamondbacks 3, Phillies 2: Josh VanMeter hit a two-run homer, Taylor Widener pitched five quality innings and host Arizo-

na beat slumping Philadelphia.

The Phillies lost for the fifth time in seven games as they try to keep pace in the National League playoff race.

Dodgers 4, Pirates 3: Matt Beaty hit a tiebreaking, two-run double with two outs in the fifth inning to lead host Los Angeles past Pittsburgh.

The Dodgers extended their franchise-record winning streak to 15 games against the Pirates. Los Angeles has won five in a row and 10 of 12 overall.

Rays 10, Orioles 0: Nelson Cruz homered twice, three pitchers combined on a four-hitter, and AL East-leading Tampa Bay extended visiting Baltimore's losing streak to 13 games.

Cruz moved past Dave Kingman into 42nd place on the all-time home runs list with 443.

Braves 2, Marlins 0: Jorge Soler snapped a scoreless tie with a two-out RBI single in the eighth inning, and visiting Atlanta beat Miami.

Nationals 12, Blue Jays 6: Riley Adams homered and drove in three in his first game against his former team, Erick Fedde won for the first time in more than two months and host Washington snapped a season-high, seven-game losing streak.

Angels 8, Tigers 2: Jo Adell hit a tiebreaking grand slam in the ninth inning for

his first homer this season and Kurt Suzuki followed with a solo blast, lifting visiting Los Angeles past Detroit.

Miguel Cabrera, one home run away from No. 500, was 0-for-2 with two walks.

Brewers 2, Cardinals 0: Corbin Burnes took a no-hitter into the sixth inning and Kolten Wong had three hits and was hit by a pitch against his former team as visiting Milwaukee beat St. Louis.

Mariners 3, Rangers 1: Tyler Anderson allowed one run on three hits in six innings for his first win with Seattle in a win over host Texas.

Royals 3, Astros 1: Daniel Lynch allowed one run over seven innings, Hanser Alberto hit a two-run double in the sixth, and host Kansas City beat Houston.

White Sox 9, Athletics 0: Oakland pitcher Chris Bassitt was carted off the field after he was struck on the side of his head by a line drive, casting a shadow over his team's loss to José Abreu and host Chicago.

Indians 3, Twins 1: Eli Morgan threw six scoreless innings, Daniel Johnson hit a two-run homer and visiting Cleveland held on to beat Minnesota.

Rockies 7, Padres 3: Germán Márquez pitched into the seventh inning and helped himself with two hits and two RBIs as host Colorado overcame three home runs by San Diego.

Giants Mara says everyone on team is on the hot seat

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — New York Giants owner John Mara is sick of losing and expects it to change.

Giving his annual preseason state of the team talk on Tuesday, Mara said the team made progress in Joe Judge's first season and it looks better — at least on paper — heading into 2021. Now it needs to prove it by winning.

The Giants have not had a winning season since 2016, when they went 11-5. It's the only time they made the postseason since winning the Super Bowl in February 2012. Over the past four seasons they have won 18 games, including a 6-10 mark last season.

"We're all on the hot seat, with our fans in particular," Mara said when asked if general manager Dave Gettleman was facing a must-win season after winning 15 games in his three seasons. "We've given them too many losing seasons. It's time for us to start winning."

Gettleman and Mara see a better team in training camp, but the end product needs to be there.

Gettleman said he believes New York is a legitimate playoff contender.

Somewhat echoing his statements of a year ago, Mara said he wants to walk off the field after the last game having a positive feeling about the team. He added one corollary. He wants to walk off the field at that last game feeling this is a team that is capable of winning a fifth Super Bowl in franchise history.

"I'm not issuing a playoff mandate," Mara said. "I don't think those ever do you any

good. I don't think I need to say or do anything to motivate the people in this building any more than they're already motivated. They all want to win."

The 66-year-old chief executive also said things will have to be reevaluated if the team takes a step back in this 17-game season.

Mara continues to show unwavering belief in Judge, noting the 39-year-old coach exudes confidence, the players respond to him and he sees the big picture.

"I'm convinced that we have the right guy at the helm," Mara said.

Mara spoke on a number of other topics, including possible upcoming negotiations with quarterback Daniel Jones and running back Saquon Barkley, who is returning after missing most of last season with an ACL injury.

Jones will be entering his third season and many people are hoping he starts playing like a quarterback capable of leading a team to a title.

While the No. 6 pick in the 2019 draft has been inconsistent, he has more skill players on offense to help him, including big free agent signee Kenny Golladay at wide receiver.

Mara said the coaches love Jones' work ethic and leadership. He just wants to see that translate to more wins.

Barkley simply needs to get back on the field and play like his first two seasons, when he gained at least 1,000 yards rushing.

"Our medical people feel very good about where he's at right now," Mara said of Barkley.

Dalton deals with the hype of rookie QB Fields

Associated Press

LAKE FOREST, Ill. — Quarterback Andy Dalton has the support of Chicago Bears coach Matt Nagy even if it's apparent the allegiance of fans at Soldier Field rests elsewhere.

The Bears have a unique quarterback situation with popular rookie Justin Fields not expected to win the starting spot away from Dalton for opening day despite eye-opening play in the first preseason game, a 20-13 win over the Miami Dolphins on Saturday.

At least judging from fan reaction against Miami, it could be Dalton fighting an uphill battle even though he owns the job.

"That's not easy being on that sideline for that game and hearing when Justin runs out, all the cheers," Nagy said. "I mean, let's just face it, if that was any of us, that's not easy."

It's not as if Dalton is being booed — although No. 3 quarterback Nick Foles was when he replaced Fields.

Booing this week likely will be reserved for former Bears quarterback Mitchell Trubisky when he returns Saturday to play for Buffalo in a preseason game at Soldier Field.

Dalton merely shrugs off the Fields mania and maintains his focus on the Sept. 12 opener against the Los Angeles Rams, all while also helping Fields to learn the ways of the NFL.

Dalton knows Fields is the future, but is trying to make it a more distant future. Fields' 10-for-14 effort for 142 yards against Miami was solid, but Dalton might be most impressed with Fields' speed.

"I think when he first got here, I asked him, 'What is it like to run 4.4?' " Dalton said of Fields' 40-yard time. "He's special."

Big 12 teams may face forfeits over virus outbreaks

Associated Press

IRVING, Texas — Big 12 teams unable to play a game this fall because of COVID-19, or any other reasons, will have to forfeit and be given a loss in the conference standings.

The Big 12 released its game threshold policy Tuesday. A no contest would be declared only if both teams are unable to compete, and there are no plans to make up any games not played as scheduled.

Roster thresholds that were in effect for the Big 12 last season are no longer in

play. Teams without at least 53 available players, and a minimum number at certain positions, could get a no contest declared last year if unable to play and unable to reschedule the game.

The Big 12 said a forfeit can happen at any point before a completed contest, and when possible would occur prior to the visiting team traveling to the game site.

Both teams would be deemed to have played the game for the purposes of conference standings only, with the team not forfeiting being credited with a win in the

standings.

Pac-12 officials said last week that its teams that cannot play because of COVID-19 issues will likely be forced to forfeit games, with the conference reinstituting its forfeiture policy after it modified its rules last season because of the pandemic. SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey has been clear that forfeits — not postponements, like last year — were on the table in his league.

The Big 12 last season got 43 of its 45 scheduled conference games played.

Bucks playing at home for Christmas

Associated Press

The Milwaukee Bucks are staying home for Christmas, which is becoming an annual perk for reigning NBA champions.

The NBA released the schedule for the Dec. 25 quintupleheader on Tuesday, and the Bucks will play host to the Boston Celtics in the second of the day's games. It marks the eighth consecutive season in which the reigning champion has gotten to play at home for the holiday.

Also set for Christmas this year: Atlanta opens the day at New York, Golden State visits its reigning Western Conference champion Phoenix, Brooklyn plays at the Los Angeles Lakers, and Dallas goes to Utah in the day's finale.

The full season schedule will be released Friday afternoon, the NBA said. The league is returning to an 82-game season after playing a 72-game slate last season because of the pandemic, and it is expected that the Toronto Raptors — who spent last season playing home games in Tampa, Fla. — will be al-

lowed to play in their home city again this season.

Atlanta's Christmas game will be its first since 1989, ending what was the longest drought in the NBA among franchises with at least one Christmas appearance. Charlotte and Memphis have yet to play on the holiday.

For Lakers star LeBron James, though, Christmas appearances are just about an annual occurrence. And this year's matchup will likely be of the history-making variety.

If James plays in the Dec. 25 game against the Nets, it would be his 16th Christmas appearance and tie Kobe Bryant for the most in NBA history. If James starts that game, he would break a tie with Bryant for most Christmas starts; Bryant came off the bench once. If James scores more than 12 points, he will also pass Bryant for the most Christmas points; Bryant has 395, James 383. And should the Lakers win, James would become the first player to appear in 11 Christmas victories, breaking a tie with Dwyane

Wade. The Bucks, Lakers, Celtics, Nets, Warriors and Mavericks all played on Christmas last season. Utah and New York return for the first time since 2018, and Phoenix is getting its first Christmas game since 2009.

Opening week

The NBA also released the schedule of nationally televised games for opening week, and this season will begin where last season ended — in Milwaukee, with the Bucks celebrating a championship.

Ring night in Milwaukee, as expected, is Oct. 17, when the Bucks will open the season against Brooklyn, and with NBA Commissioner Adam Silver expected to be in attendance, as per tradition, to hand out the jewelry. Milwaukee won a Game 7 in the Eastern Conference semifinals on the Nets' home floor during its run to its first championship in 50 years. The other game on the slate for Oct. 17 has Golden State playing at the Lakers.

Walker's welcome: Kemba back home in New York

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The "Welcome to New York" signs decorating the outside of Madison Square Garden and hanging behind him were nice, though unnecessary.

Kemba Walker needs no introduction around here.

He's a New York native who was already playing at Madison Square Garden in high school and made a memorable buzzer-beater during a historic Big East tournament run while playing for Connecticut.

Now he gets to see what he can do while playing there for the New York Knicks.

"It's going to be better," Walker said. "Ten times better."

The Knicks held a news conference Tuesday to announce the additions of Walker and Evan Fournier, his teammate last season with the Boston Celtics who was acquired in a sign-and-trade deal.

Fournier, like many around

the NBA, called Madison Square Garden his favorite arena. But few players — Knicks or otherwise — can match Walker's history in the building.

The highlight video montage that played before the start of the news conference included Walker's step-back jumper to beat Pittsburgh in the quarterfinals of the 2011 Big East tournament, when he led the Huskies to a stunning stretch of five wins in five days.

"That was just a special, special run," Walker said.

They followed it by winning the NCAA championship, with Walker the Most Outstanding Player. He went on to play eight seasons with the Charlotte Hornets and thought there was a chance he would sign with the Knicks in 2019 as a free agent before instead going to Boston.

Now, a decade after he lit up the arena, the arena was lit up with his picture.

"I think everything is perfect. Everything," Walker said. "Per-

fect timing." It happened after the Celtics traded him to Oklahoma City in June. Walker agreed to a buyout so he could sign elsewhere, though said the Knicks were his only choice.

At 31, the 6-foot-1 Walker may no longer be the same player who has averaged 19.9 points and been selected to four All-Star Games. He struggled with knee pain in each of the past two postseasons, though said Tuesday he feels great now.

No matter what, his signing was popular in New York, where the Knicks have long searched for a point guard and may have finally found one right in town. Walker was besieged by messages from friends, old coaches and beyond following the news that he'd be a Knick.

"I planned on telling everybody I only get four tickets," Walker joked to a small crowd at MSG that included his mother and sister.

Fournier agreed to his four-year deal worth about \$78 mil-

lion while in Tokyo, where he was France's leading scorer in the Olympics. The French beat the U.S. in their opening game and lost to them in the final, matching their best finish with a silver medal.

The swingman averaged 17.1 points last season for Orlando and Boston and should provide scoring punch for a Knicks team that defended well under Tom Thibodeau but was searching for more offense in the offseason.

Fournier spoke to Thibodeau during the tournament, with the coach not only wooing the player but also talking trash to him, telling Fournier that after he won a silver medal that he needed to come to New York and talk.

"Unfortunately that's what happened," said Fournier, though he knew by then that the Knicks were his destination.

"It was pretty clear to me that New York was going to be the team for me," he said.