

Taliban again violently crush protests

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghan protesters defied the Taliban for a second day Thursday, waving their national flag in scattered demonstrations, and the fighters again responded violently as they faced down growing challenges to their rule.

A United Nations official warned of dire food shortages and experts said the country was severely in need of cash while noting that the Taliban are unlikely to enjoy the generous international aid that the civilian government they dethroned did.

In light of these challenges, the Taliban have moved quickly to suppress any dissent, despite their promises that they have become more moderate since they last ruled Afghanistan with draconian laws. Many fear they will succeed in erasing two decades of efforts to expand women's and human rights and remake the country.

On Thursday, a procession of cars and people near Kabul's airport carried long black, red and

green banners in honor of the Afghan flag — a banner that is becoming a symbol of defiance. At another protest in Nangarhar province, video posted online showed a bleeding demonstrator with a gunshot wound. Onlookers tried to carry him away.

In Khost province, Taliban authorities instituted a 24-hour curfew Thursday after violently breaking up another protest, according to information obtained by journalists monitoring from abroad. The authorities did not immediately acknowledge the demonstration or the curfew.

Protesters also took the streets in Kunar province, according to witnesses and social media videos that lined up with reporting by The Associated Press.

The demonstrations — which come as Afghans celebrated Independence Day and some commemorated the Shiite Ashoura festival — were a remarkable show of defiance after the Taliban fighters violently dispersed a protest Wednesday. At that rally, in the eastern city of Jalalabad,

demonstrators lowered the Taliban's flag and replace it with Afghanistan's tricolor. At least one person was killed.

Meanwhile, opposition figures gathering in the last area of the country not under Taliban rule talked of launching an armed resistance under the banner of the Northern Alliance, which allied with the U.S. during the 2001 invasion.

It was not clear how serious a threat they posed given that Taliban fighters overran nearly the entire country in a matter of days with little resistance from Afghan forces.

The Taliban so far have offered no specifics on how they will lead, other than to say they will be guided by Shariah, or Islamic, law. They are in talks with senior officials of previous Afghan governments. But they face an increasingly precarious situation.

"A humanitarian crisis of incredible proportions is unfolding before our eyes," warned Mary Ellen McGroarty, the head of the U.N.'s World Food Program in Af-

ghanistan.

Amid that uncertainty and concerns that the Taliban will reimpose a brutal rule, which included largely confining women to their homes and holding public executions, many Afghans are trying to flee the country.

At Kabul's international airport, military evacuation flights continued, but access to the airport remained difficult. On Thursday, Taliban fighters fired into the air to try to control the crowds gathered at the airport's blast walls.

After a chaotic start that saw people rush the runway and cling to a plane taking off, the U.S. military is ramping up evacuations and now has enough aircraft to get 5,000 to 9,000 people out a day, Army Maj. Gen. Hank Taylor said Thursday. Overnight, President Joe Biden said that he was committed to keeping U.S. troops in Afghanistan until every American is evacuated, even if that means maintaining a military presence there beyond his Aug. 31 deadline for withdrawal.

US health officials urge COVID booster shots at 8 months

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. health officials Wednesday announced plans to dispense COVID-19 booster shots to all Americans to shore up their protection amid the surging delta variant and signs that the vaccines' effectiveness is slipping.

The plan, as outlined by the chief of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other top health authorities, calls for an extra dose eight months after people get their second shot of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. The doses could begin the week of

Sept. 20.

"Our plan is to protect the American people, to stay ahead of this virus," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said as the agency cited a raft of studies suggesting that the vaccines are losing ground while the highly contagious variant spreads.

People who received the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine will also probably need extra shots, health officials said. But they said they are waiting for more data.

Officials said that before any booster program starts up, the

Food and Drug Administration and a CDC advisory panel would need to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of an extra dose.

"We have a responsibility to give the maximum amount of protection," President Joe Biden said at the White House. He added that extra doses are also "the best way to protect ourselves from new variants that could arise."

The announcement came the same day the Biden administration said it would require nursing homes to mandate vaccinations for staffers in order to continue

receiving federal funds. Hundreds of thousands of nursing home workers remain unvaccinated.

Officials said it is "very clear" that the vaccines' protection against infections wanes over time, and they noted the worsening picture in Israel, which has seen a rise in severe cases, many of them in inoculated people.

Top scientists at the World Health Organization bitterly objected to the U.S. plan, noting that poor countries are not getting enough vaccine for their initial rounds of shots.

Poll: Afghan war unpopular amid chaotic pullout

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A significant majority of Americans doubt that the war in Afghanistan was worthwhile, even as the United States is more divided over President Joe Biden's handling of foreign policy and national security, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Roughly two-thirds said they did not think America's longest war was worth fighting, the poll shows. Meanwhile, 47% approve of Biden's management of international affairs, while 52% approve of Biden on national security.

The president has stood by his decision to exit the country, insisting that he will not allow the war to continue indefinitely and betting that Americans agree with him.

Mark Sohl is among those who do. The 62-year-old Democrat from Topeka, Kan., said "it wasn't worth losing more American lives over a mess."

Sohl added: "After 20 years, you got to cut loose."

Others felt more conflicted after seeing grim scenes in Afghanistan, even if they opposed the war overall. In one image likely to endure, Afghans clung to U.S. military planes in a desperate bid to flee the country.

"I don't believe we should have been in there to begin with," said Sebastian Garcia, a 23-year-old Biden voter from Lubbock, Texas, who said he had three cousins serve in Afghanistan. "But now that we're leaving, I do feel we probably should stay after seeing, I guess you'd say, the trouble we've caused."

Roughly two-thirds also suggest the Iraq War that coincided with Afghanistan was a mistake. Republicans are somewhat more likely than Democrats to say the wars in both countries were worth fighting. About 4 in 10 Republicans do, compared with about 3 in 10 Democrats.

Deborah Fulkerson of Pueblo, Colo., believes it would be wise for the U.S. to remain in Afghanistan.

"I feel like us having a presence there just keeps things more neutral and safer there for those people and for us," said the 62-year-old, who describes herself as "more conservative," particularly on social issues.

US troops in Qatar put in hours to aid Afghan people

BY CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

Military personnel are working around the clock at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar to facilitate the U.S. airlift from Afghanistan this week, while others launched clothing drives and volunteer efforts, base residents said.

People dragged cots and mattresses into their offices in an operations center, said one resident Wednesday, who asked not to be named because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

Cargo plane and refueler activity in the air suggested crews were about on target for the Pentagon's one-flight-per-hour pace for the evacuation, said the resident, who wanted to highlight the "flex and give" the operation required, referring to added workloads and hardships.

"It's going to put strains everywhere," he said of the effect the mission would have on personnel, facilities and equipment.

The rapid Taliban advance last week caught the Biden administration flat-footed, leaving tens of thousands of Americans, allies and desperate Afghan citizens stuck in the country while awaiting the possibility of

evacuation.

The U.S. could have the capacity to evacuate 5,000 to 9,000 people each day at "full throttle," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters Thursday.

But a day earlier at Al Udeid, people were already scrambling to prepare the base as the flights started arriving, the resident said.

Officials appeared not to have planned for security escorts from the flight line. Some airmen were surprised at the end of a normal shift to be suddenly assigned the extra duty earlier this week, the resident said.

The influx has also put pressure on some base services, with dumpsters filling up so fast that an email went out telling all personnel to begin crushing their trash. The base's water supply, which is already limited in summer, could also be strained.

Still, some service members were looking to do whatever they could to help, a discussion on a Facebook group for base residents showed.

"The most important thing I do in my time here is not even going to be during work hours," one group member said on a personal page earlier this week.

Biden sees greater threats than Taliban-governed Afghanistan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden says even with the Taliban in power in Afghanistan, he sees a greater threat from outposts of al-Qaida and its affiliated groups in other countries, and that it was no longer "rational" to continue to focus U.S. military power there.

"We should be focusing on where the threat is the greatest," Biden said in an interview that aired on ABC's "Good Morning America" Thursday.

"And the idea we can continue to spend a trillion dollars, and have tens of thousands of American forces in Afghanistan, when we have North Africa and Western Africa — the idea we can do that

and ignore those looming problems, growing problems, is not rational."

Biden has said repeatedly that America will not send significantly more forces to fight in Afghanistan. The United States has not had tens of thousands there for several years and had 2,500 to 3,000 deployed there when Biden took office.

Biden named Syria and East Africa as places where the Islamic State poses a "significantly greater threat" than in Afghanistan and said that ISIS has "metastasized." He said while the U.S. doesn't have a sizable military presence in a place like Syria, it does have an "over the horizon capability to take them out."

Building contracts OK'd for Marine base on Guam

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The Navy approved two more construction contracts this week totaling \$134.5 million for facilities on Camp Blaz, the new Marine Corps base on Guam expected to absorb troops relocated from Okinawa.

Cadell-Nan Joint Venture, of Montgomery, Ala., was awarded a \$36.5 million contract Tuesday to build the warehouse at Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz, according to a news release that day from Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command.

In a separate release on the same day, the command announced that Black Construction-Tutor Perini Joint Venture, based at Harmon, Guam, won a \$98 million contract to build the bachelor officer quarters.

The Navy has awarded \$936.5 million in contracts to build por-

tions of Camp Blaz since the Marine Corps commissioned the base in October 2020. It's the first new Marine installation since the activation in 1952 of Marine Corps Logistics Base Albany in Georgia.

Camp Blaz is expected to accommodate 5,000 members of the III Marine Expeditionary Force who are set to move in over the next five years from Okinawa.

Japan is paying \$3 billion to build portions of Camp Blaz, including the officer quarters and the warehouse, under the Defense Policy Review Initiative, an agreement to relocate some Marine Corps aviation assets from Okinawa. The United States is spending another \$5.7 billion.

Will Boudra, Guam program management office director for Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Pacific

Guam, said in the release that with the officer quarters contract, all 18 construction projects in the agreement for fiscal year 2021 have been awarded.

Plans for the bachelor officer quarters call for a housing tower and one-story common area wing. The building is scheduled for completion May 2024.

The warehouse is expected to be completed by 2023.

"This project provides general support warehouse required for storage and administrative space to support the distribution management office, base supply, food services, and general services administrative daily operations," said Grant Nakata, said Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Pacific design manager, in the release.

Cadell-Nan, the warehouse builder, already has two contracts worth approximately \$304

million to build three of eight planned bachelor enlisted quarters at the base, according to the company's website.

The contract announcements this week cap a series of awards since October.

Chugach Consolidated Solutions LLC, of Anchorage, Alaska, won an \$8 million contract Aug. 13 to build a combat training facility, according to a Navy news release.

Core Tech-HDCC-Kajima LLC, of Tamunig, Guam, won two contracts Aug. 5 worth \$579.5 million to build the remaining five multistory barracks and a fire station. The company in May received a \$45 million contract to build the Blaz medical and dental clinic.

Only 1,300 Marines will be permanently stationed at Camp Blaz, with another 3,700 coming as a rotational force.

Fallen Osprey pieces larger than Marines first reported

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND MARI HIGA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Marine Corps on Wednesday told Japanese authorities on Okinawa that two pieces that fell from an MV-22B Osprey last week were much larger than the Marines first described them.

A spokesman for the Okinawa Defense Bureau, an arm of the Japan Ministry of Defense, on Thursday said that information raised more questions.

"There was no explanation on how the mistake was made," the bureau spokesman said. "We are currently waiting for additional information from the U.S. side."

The Osprey crew reported a panel and a piece of fairing missing when the tilt-rotor aircraft returned around 9:30 p.m. Aug. 12 to Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Ginowan. The crew

had flown back, mostly over water, from the Central Training Area, according to 1st Marine Wing spokesman Maj. Ken Kunze on Monday.

Marines told the defense bureau the panel measured 14 by 18 inches and the fairing measured 9 by 3, Kunze said at the time.

On Wednesday, the Marine Corps corrected that information and told the bureau the panel was actually about 3 1/2 by 2 1/4 feet and nearly an inch thick, a bureau spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday. The panel is normally situated above the cockpit, he said.

He said the fairing, from the right engine cover, measures 17 by 17 inches.

The crew did not see the parts fall from the aircraft and no injuries or damage have been reported, Kunze wrote in an email to Stars and Stripes on Monday.

US Navy in Naples orders masks in most indoor areas

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The high number of delta variant cases of COVID-19 in Italy's southern Campania region has triggered a mandatory indoor mask order at Naval Support Activity Naples, base officials said Thursday.

Indoor masks at the NSA Naples Capodichino and Grignano di Aversa sites are now mandatory regardless of vaccination status, the base said in a post to its Facebook page. Wearing masks outdoors is required if social distancing of 6 feet or more cannot be maintained.

Italy reported 69 COVID-19 deaths Wednesday, an increase over 54 the day before, according to the Italian Health Ministry. New infections grew to 7,162 from 5,273. In Campania, 336 peo-

ple with COVID-19 were in the hospital Wednesday and another 20 were in intensive care. There were 558 new cases.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says community transmission levels are substantial when new cases average 50 to 99.99 per 100,000 people over seven days.

Exceptions to the NSA Naples mandatory indoor mask order include people in their own home, those working alone in an office with a closed door, or those eating or drinking with proper social distancing.

Children under 2 years old, people with a documented medical necessity and those actively working out in a gym were also excluded from wearing a mask indoors, the base said.

US jobless claims hit new pandemic low

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of people seeking unemployment benefits fell last week for a fourth straight time to a pandemic low, the latest sign that America's job market is rebounding from the pandemic recession as employers boost hiring to meet a surge in consumer demand.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that jobless claims fell by 29,000 to 348,000.

The weekly pace of applications for unemployment aid has fallen more or less steadily since topping 900,000 in early January. The dwindling number of first-time

jobless claims has coincided with the widespread administering of vaccines, which has led businesses to reopen or expand their hours and drawn consumers back to shops, restaurants, airports and entertainment venues.

Still, the number of applications remains high by historic standards: Before the pandemic tore through the economy in March 2020, the weekly pace amounted to around 220,000 a week. And now there is growing concern that the highly contagious delta variant could disrupt the economy's recovery from last year's brief but intense recession. Some economists have already begun

to mark down their estimates for growth this quarter as some measures of economic activity, like air travel, have started to weaken.

Filings for unemployment benefits have traditionally been seen as a real-time measure of the job market's health. But their reliability has deteriorated during the pandemic. In many states, the weekly figures have been inflated by fraud and by multiple filings from unemployed Americans as they navigate bureaucratic hurdles to try to obtain benefits. Those complications help explain why the pace of applications remains comparatively high.

California wildfire siege burns dozens of houses

Associated Press

GRIZZLY FLATS, Calif. — A small wildfire swept through a mobile home park, leaving dozens of homes in ashes, the latest in a series of explosive blazes propelled by gusts that have torn through Northern California mountains and forests.

The drought-parched region was expected to see red flag warnings for dangerously high winds and hot, dry weather through Thursday.

Those conditions have fed a dozen uncontrolled wildfires, including the month-old Dixie Fire and the nearby Caldor Fire in the northern Sierra Nevada that incinerated much of the small rural towns of Greenville and Grizzly Flats.

No deaths have been reported despite the

speed and damage of the blazes.

On Wednesday, a grass fire driven by winds up to 30 mph destroyed dozens of mobile homes in Lake County and injured at least one resident before firefighters stopped its progress, fire officials said at an evening briefing.

Rows of homes were destroyed on at least two blocks and television footage showed crews dousing burning homes with water. Children were rushed out of an elementary school as a field across the street burned.

Some 1,600 people were ordered to flee, with Lake County Sheriff Brian Martin warning of "immediate threat to life and property."

Lake County has experienced repeated wildfires in the past decade that have destroyed hundreds of homes.

At least 16,000 other homes remain threatened by California wildfires, which are among some 100 burning throughout a dozen Western states, fire officials said.

Tens of thousands of people remain under evacuation orders.

No deaths have been reported, despite the speed and ferocity of the blazes, which have at times created their own erratic winds from heated air swirling into smoke clouds. Flames have also leapfrogged miles ahead of the front lines as winds scattered embers, hot ash and chunks of wood into dry vegetation, said Thom Porter, chief of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

"This is not going to end anytime soon," he said of the Dixie Fire. "Everybody's going to be sucking smoke for a long time."

Accuser says R. Kelly made her dress like Girl Scout

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A key accuser at the R. Kelly sex-trafficking trial returned to the witness stand on Thursday, saying he often videotaped their sexual encounters and demanded she dress like a Girl Scout during a relationship that began when she was a minor.

Jerhonda Pace resumed her testimony in Brooklyn federal court a day after telling jurors she was a 16-year-old virgin and a member of Kelly's fan club when he invited her to his mansion in 2010. While there, she said, she was told to follow "Rob's rules" — edicts restricting how she could dress, who she could speak with and when she could use the bathroom.

She said Kelly — born Robert Sylvester Kelly — sometimes demanded she wear pig-tails and "dress like a Girl Scout" during sexual encounters that Kelly often videotaped.

On cross examination, defense attorney Deveraux Cannick sought to show Pace hid her true motivations regarding Kelly and deceived him by lying about her age.

"You were in fact stalking him, right?" Cannick asked.

"That is not right," she responded.

Pace had testified earlier she told Kelly she was 19 when they met but had informed him she was only 16 by the time he sexually abused her.

Cannick confronted her with a lawsuit settlement she signed indicating she agreed

she never revealed to Kelly that she was a minor. She said it was in exchange for hush money.

The questioning fit a theme that defense lawyers have repeatedly pushed early in the trial: Kelly was victimized by groupies who hounded him at shows and afterward, only to turn against him years later when public sentiment shifted against him, they allege.

To bolster their claims against Kelly, prosecutors showed jurors screenshots from Pace's phone showing several communications with Kelly in January 2010, including a text from him reading, "Please call." There was also a photo of her with "Rob" tattooed to her chest. She said she's since "covered it up with a black heart."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man, 84, gets 21 years in prison for bank robbery

AZ PHOENIX — An 84-year-old man who spent most of his adult life behind bars for robbing banks was sentenced Tuesday to more than 21 years in prison for carrying out an armed heist at an Arizona credit union.

Authorities say Robert Krebs carried out the January 2018 holdup in Tucson about seven months after he was released from prison as he was struggling to adjust to life on the outside. Krebs, who was in a wheelchair and had difficulty hearing during his sentencing, declined to answer a judge's question about whether he accepted responsibility for his actions.

Krebs' attorney, Erin Carrillo, said her client committed the Tucson robbery to return to prison because he didn't feel like he fit into society after spending decades in prison. "To get out of the freedom business and go back to the penitentiary — that's what he told me," Carrillo said.

Thousands of live sand dollars wash up on coast

OR SEASIDE — Scores of live sand dollars began washing ashore on the Oregon coast Sunday, mystifying locals.

The Seaside Aquarium posted photos of the sand dollars to Facebook on Sunday, reporting that thousands washed up with the afternoon high tides on the south end of Seaside Beach, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported.

"At this time, we do not know what has caused this, and these types of incidents usually have several contributing factors," the aquarium wrote on Facebook.

Sand dollars can only live a few minutes out of the ocean, the

aquarium said. They are a species of sea urchin covered in tube feet and spines that they use to move and eat. In rough waters they lie flat partially buried in the sand, but in calmer waters they stand upright like wheels.

Trial continued when too few show for jury duty

VA DANVILLE — The trial for a man charged in the death of a Virginia cab driver was continued Monday when too few people showed up for jury selection.

Danville Circuit Court Judge James Reynolds set a new trial date in December for James Fultz IV, who is charged with first-degree murder in the death of Wendy Harris in January, news outlets report.

Thirty-five potential jurors were needed at 9 a.m., but only about 25 showed by then. Twelve jurors and an alternate were needed for the two-day trial.

"It's a damning statement on our community," Reynolds said.

Fultz and the commonwealth are entitled to a trial by jury and 15 witnesses had set aside two days, he said.

Fleeing man accused of stealing police cruiser

MO LAKE OZARK — A Missouri man is jailed after he allegedly rammed one police cruiser and stole another cruiser before being arrested as he tried to hide under a dock at the Lake of the Ozarks, police said.

Kenneth Rybolt, 26, of Columbia, is facing five felony counts and one misdemeanor after the chase in Miller and Camden counties.

Lake Ozark police said when officers responded to a shoplifting call on Saturday, the suspect

rammed a police car and drove off before hitting another vehicle and crashing the car, KRCG-TV reported.

He was apprehended and placed in the back of a cruiser with his ankles shackled and hands cuffed behind his back but managed to drive off in the cruiser, police said.

A Porto Cima resident later reported the cruiser had crashed and the suspect tried to steal his car, police said.

Police said Rybolt tried to steal a personal watercraft from an unoccupied home but was recaptured when a Lake Ozark officer jumped into the lake and found him — still shackled and cuffed — in the water.

Injuries reported when bench collapses at arena

NC WENDELL — A bench collapsed at a North Carolina arena that was hosting a rodeo, leaving nearly a dozen people with minor injuries, a sheriff's office said.

The Wake County Sheriff's Office said a deputy working off-duty at the rodeo on the site alerted dispatchers about the incident.

Sheriff's office spokesman Eric Curry said witnesses reported about a dozen people were seen dancing and jumping on the bleachers before they collapsed. The arena is located on a farm in Wendell.

2nd man pleads guilty in ATM skimming scam

MA BOSTON — A Bulgarian man has pleaded guilty to his role in a scheme to create counterfeit ATM cards that were then used to steal money from other people's bank accounts, federal prosecutors said Tuesday.

Anatoli Mitrev, 34, pleaded

guilty in the so-called skimming scam to conspiracy to commit access device fraud in federal court on Monday, according to a statement from the U.S. attorney's office in Boston. He faces 8 ½ years at sentencing scheduled for Oct. 19.

Mitrev and another man installed skimmers and cameras on two Martha's Vineyard Savings Bank ATMs in the summer of 2013, prosecutors said. The devices allowed them to obtain card information, including personal identification codes, from customers, which were then used to create counterfeit ATM cards and withdraw funds from the compromised accounts.

University has just its 2nd female drum major

LA GRAMBLING — A historically black public university in Louisiana has its second female drum major, nearly 70 years after the first.

Candace Hawthorne, of Dallas, is one of three drum majors this year for Grambling State University's marching band, the school said in a news release.

"It's extremely mind-blowing," said Hawthorne, a senior majoring in both engineering technology and music. "I never would have expected for me to make history like this."

She said she had always wanted to be a drum major but had lacked the confidence to audition.

Grambling said its first female drum major was Velma Patricia Patterson, who served through 1952. The school did not say when she started.

This year's other drum majors are head drum major Deante Gibson, a senior from Jeanerette, La., and Sheavion Jones, a junior from Dallas.

— From wire reports

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Lewis ready to spread wings with Jets

Associated Press

Zane Lewis enjoyed the serenity of the sky, soaring through the air in his single-engine plane high above the world below.

As a cadet in the Air Force Academy's powered flight program, Lewis would strap into the cockpit with a trainer and take off. He'd glide the Cirrus SR20 over the campus and get breathtaking views of Colorado Springs.

"At first, it definitely is scary, but the more you do it, it's more calming," the New York Jets safety said. "You're up there and it's just, like, you. When you're driving, there's cars going past you left and right. But up there, it's mostly just you."

The worst part for Lewis, though, was coming back down. Literally.

"Landing was very, very tough for me," Lewis said with a big laugh.

Touchdown, Lewis.

Conquering challenges is nothing new for the Richmond, Va., native. The latest has the 23-year-old Lewis making the switch from cornerback, the position he has played most of his career, to safety in New York's defense.

Lewis has three interceptions in team drills during camp, flashing the type of playmaking ability that made him a star his last two years

at Air Force.

"Obviously, there's a learning process that he's got to go through, going from corner to safety," coach Robert Saleh said. "I thought he's done a really nice job through OTAs and training camp. He's stacked up some good days and he's got to continue to stack things up. But I'm encouraged with the way it has gone so far."

Last Friday, the Jets and Giants hosted their first Salute to Service Bowl at MetLife Stadium — a game that consisted of teams of active-duty service members from all branches of the armed forces. Given other circumstances, Lewis might have been playing in that event. Instead, he was on the field the following night for the Jets in their preseason opener.

This NFL opportunity didn't come without overcoming a few hurdles.

Serving five years of active military service is required of Air Force Academy graduates. The Department of Defense adopted a policy in November 2019 that allows athletes to delay their active-duty service. They must eventually fulfill their obligation or have to repay the costs of their education.

Lewis became the first Air Force senior to

apply for deferred service time, a process that took a few months and requires service athletes to provide proof they have a viable professional career path. Lewis went undrafted last year, but was signed as a free agent by Arizona — fulfilling that major requirement.

"I'm thankful for the Force allowing me to be able to play this sport I love," Lewis said, "and pursue this dream of mine."

Lewis spent last summer in training camp with the Cardinals before being a late-camp cut. The Jets claimed him the next day and he was reunited with Chip Vaughn, a defensive assistant in New York who was Lewis' secondary coach at Air Force.

Lewis was among the Jets' final cuts but was signed to the practice squad, where he spent the season. Now he's trying to make the Week 1 roster. Being at Air Force certainly helped Lewis prepare for the rigors of training camp.

"Going through basic training, that was very tough — long, long days," he said. "In the morning, they're screaming at you and going, 'Get up! Wake up!' You have to be up and do things very fast. And yeah, throughout the whole day, you have to be on your game. And that's how it has to be on the field, too."

Rookie QBs fuel hype with impressive debuts

Associated Press

Justin Fields outshined his fellow first-round quarterbacks in their preseason openers.

Trevor Lawrence, Zach Wilson, Trey Lance and Mac Jones also made a positive impression in their debuts. So did Jordan Love, who isn't a rookie but didn't take a snap last year.

A few series against backups, third-stringers and future practice squad guys won't determine much about any young player but a strong start is better than a poor one.

"We all want him to play really well," Bears coach Matt Nagy said of Fields. "That's a good thing for him to go out and play well."

While fans and analysts will overhype preseason performances, most coaches put more stock into practices than games, especially the joint sessions against other clubs.

Fields, the fourth QB selected in the NFL Draft at No. 11 overall, was 14-for-20 for 142 yards in just over two quarters of action for Chicago against Miami's reserves.

He made impressive throws outside the pocket and overcame a fumble during a scramble following a spin move.

The former Ohio State star had no problem adjusting to the game speed.

"It was actually kind of slow to me, to be honest," Fields said.

It'll get much faster, especially when the games count.

Nagy plans to start veteran Andy Dalton in Week 1 regardless of how well Fields performs in the preseason. Dalton is expected to take more snaps against Buffalo on Saturday.

"Justin understands the plan, he understands the process," Nagy said.

But Nagy also wants to see

Fields play against a starting defense at some point.

"It can be good to see what he does against a first-team defense," Nagy said. "It's part of the evaluation process. There's zero scheming going on in these preseason games."

Lawrence, the No. 1 overall pick, got sacked and fumbled on his first play from scrimmage with Jacksonville. He bounced back and completed 6 of 9 passes for 71 yards in two series.

Lawrence started over Gardner Minshew but Jaguars rookie coach Urban Meyer hasn't officially given him the job. Despite the appearance of an open competition, Lawrence is expected to be behind center on Week 1.

Wilson, the No. 2 overall pick, was 6-for-9 for 63 yards and led the New York Jets to a field goal in two series. Jets coach Robert Saleh plans to give him more reps against the Packers on Sat-

urday and play him in the final preseason game next week.

"To me, he's so far ahead with regards to how he sees the game," Saleh said Tuesday about Wilson's progression. "It's not just, 'What's a formation, what's my play call?' He's looking at the other side of the ball and he's doing a really nice job and the results are changing but that can flip another time. His process has been consistent, and it's been consistently good. Hopefully, we can continue to build on it."

Lance, selected No. 3 by San Francisco, made the biggest play of all the rookie QBs last week. He rolled to his left, stopped, set his feet and launched an 80-yard touchdown pass. Aside from a couple of dazzling plays, Lance was spotty. He finished 5-for-14, including three dropped passes, for 128 yards and was sacked four times.

Ohtani dominant on mound, homers in win

Associated Press

DETROIT — Shohei Ohtani hit his 40th homer and pitched eight sharp innings, helping the Los Angeles Angels beat Miguel Cabrera and the Detroit Tigers 3-1 on Wednesday night.

The crowd of 27,282 was hoping to see Cabrera hit his 500th career homer, but the slugger went 1-for-4 with a first-inning single.

"He's obviously one of the best hitters of all time and he's also a great person," Ohtani said. "I would have been OK with giving it up, and I hope he does it sooner rather than later."

Instead, Ohtani put on a show.

The Japanese right-hander allowed six hits, struck out eight and walked none in a 90-pitch outing.

"I don't know what you can say about him that hasn't been said before," Angels manager Joe Maddon said. "He's not going to win the Triple Crown, but he's in the discussion for everything else. If you are a Cy Young or MVP voter, your eyes have to be wide-open at this point."

Ohtani (8-1) became the first major leaguer to hit 40 homers in a season in which he pitched at least 15 games. The previous record was 29 by Babe Ruth in 1919.

Braves 11, Marlins 9: Freddie Freeman hit for the cycle for the second time, powering visiting Atlanta to its sixth consecutive win.

The reigning NL MVP doubled in the first and tripled in the fourth. He singled in the fifth and hit a two-run drive in the sixth for his 27th homer.

Yankees 5, Red Sox 2: Andrew Heaney

pitched seven smooth innings, Anthony Rizzo hit a two-run single in his return from COVID-19, and host New York matched a season best with its sixth straight victory.

Substitute shortstop Andrew Velazquez, born nearby in the Bronx, delivered a pair of RBI singles from the No. 9 spot in the batting order and combined with Rizzo on a terrific defensive play for the dramatic final out.

Mets 6, Giants 2 (12): Kevin Pillar hit a three-run homer in the 12th inning, lifting New York to a win at San Francisco hours after owner Steve Cohen called out his team's hitters for a lack of production.

Six Giants pitchers combined to blank the Mets until the ninth inning, when J.D. Davis provided a tying sacrifice fly.

Dodgers 9, Pirates 0: Max Muncy slugged two homers and drove in five runs to highlight a power performance by host Los Angeles.

The Dodgers earned their sixth straight win and moved within three games of the NL West-leading Giants.

Diamondbacks 4, Phillies 2: Arizona's Humberto Castellanos earned his first major league win and added two hits at the plate in a win over visiting Philadelphia.

The Phillies lost for the sixth time in eight games and continued to lose ground in the National League playoff race.

Rays 8, Orioles 4: Ryan Yarbrough came off the COVID-19 injured list and worked five scoreless innings as AL East-leading Tampa Bay handed visiting Baltimore its 14th consecutive loss.

The Orioles, who also had a 14-game skid

from May 18-31, joined the Boston Braves as the only teams to have a pair of 14-game or longer losing streaks in the same season since 1901. The Braves did it twice, in 1911 and 1935.

White Sox 3, Athletics 2: Luis Robert had three hits and two RBIs, sending host Chicago to the victory over Oakland.

Brewers 6, Cardinals 4 (10): Jackie Bradley Jr. scampered home on a wild pitch in the 10th inning, and Avisail Garcia hit two homers to help Milwaukee rally for the win at St. Louis.

Rockies 7, Padres 5: Jake Arrieta got clobbered by host Colorado and left with an injury in his San Diego debut.

Twins 8, Indians 7 (11): Jorge Polanco drove in the game-ending run for host Minnesota for the third time in four games, lining a bases-loaded single in the 11th inning.

Mariners 3, Rangers 1: Kyle Seager hit a two-run homer for visiting Seattle, and Marco Gonzales pitched 5½ shutout innings.

Royals 3, Astros 2: Hunter Dozier hit a two-run homer in the seventh inning, and host Kansas City earned its third straight win over Houston.

Cubs 7, Reds 1: Michael Hermosillo homered for the first time since 2018, Ian Happ and Sergio Alcántara also went deep, and depleted Chicago won at Cincinnati.

Nationals 8, Blue Jays 5: Josh Bell hit a three-run homer off former teammate Brad Hand, sending host Washington to the victory over Toronto.

Judge denies woman restraining order against Bauer

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A Los Angeles judge sided with Dodgers pitcher Trevor Bauer on Thursday and denied a restraining order to a woman who said he choked her into unconsciousness and punched her repeatedly during two sexual encounters.

In denying the order after a four-day hearing, Judge Dianna Gould-Saltman said that according to the 27-year-old San Diego woman's testimony, Bauer followed her boundaries when she set them, and he couldn't know the boundaries she didn't express to him.

It was a major victory for Bauer

in his public fight to clear his name, but police and Major League Baseball are still looking into the incident.

MLB put Bauer on paid administrative leave on July 2, and it has been extended through Friday.

And police in Pasadena, Calif., are still investigating.

Bauer, who has said through representatives that everything that happened between him and the 27-year-old San Diego woman was consensual, attended all three days of the hearing.

In her third day on the witness stand Wednesday, the woman said that the satisfaction she expressed to friends when the case

first went public was a reaction to her treatment by the media, not happiness that she was taking down the Dodgers pitcher.

"It felt good to not see me slut-shamed right off the bat," the woman said under cross-examination from Bauer's lawyer Shawn Holley, who read from her text messages sent at the time.

"Media is freaking out. On my side," one of the woman's texts read. "It's the best thing I could have hoped for."

Holley asked, "What does the media freaking out have to do with your safety?"

The woman replied that she had felt Bauer's representatives

had shamed her with a statement saying the nights the two spent were wholly consensual, and she was happy to see that the media, and the public on social media, were not attacking her.

Holley asked the woman why she felt she needed protection from Bauer when he had made no contact with her in nearly a month when she filed for the order.

"That was what worried me," the woman replied, saying Bauer's silence after constantly checking on her in the days following the second incident made her fear he was planning something and may seek her out in San Diego.

Nebraska confirms NCAA investigation

Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska announced Wednesday that the NCAA is looking into its football program amid allegations Cornhuskers staff improperly used analysts and consultants with the knowledge of coach Scott Frost and even moved workouts off campus last year when such activities were banned during the pandemic.

Nebraska Athletic Director Trev Alberts confirmed the investigation first reported by The Action Network while Frost said any workouts were approved by his superiors.

“Everything we did through COVID was in the best interest and health of our players in mind and everything we did was approved by athletic department administration and campus administration,” Frost said after practice.

Citing unidentified sources, The Action Network report said Nebraska has “significant

video footage” confirming practice violations occurred in the presence of Frost and other assistants.

Alberts said the investigation started before his hiring was announced July 14 and that he found out about it after he started.

“We thought it was important the two of us come out and validate what you all have read on the internet and the reports that are out there nationally,” Alberts said.

The NCAA has interviewed Frost, current and former staff members, administrators and football players, and Frost has hired an attorney. The alleged violations occurred in the last 12 months.

“We want you to know we have complied 100% with the NCAA, been very collaborative in our approach with them in terms of all of their investigation,” Alberts said. “We will continue to do whatever the

NCAA has asked us to do. Our coaches, including coach Frost, have done a great job and have been very accessible in working with the NCAA as we’ve worked through these allegations.”

Alberts said he couldn’t comment further because of the ongoing investigation.

The report comes less than two weeks before the Huskers open Frost’s fourth season with a game at Illinois. Frost, who quarterbacked the Huskers to the 1997 national championship, returned to his alma mater in his home state after being named national coach of the year for leading Central Florida to a 13-0 record in 2017.

Frost has struggled at Nebraska, going 12-20 in his first three years and never finishing higher than fifth in the Big Ten West. The program has had four straight losing seasons, its most in a row since the late

1950s.

Frost is under contract through 2026, and his current buyout is \$20 million.

The NCAA investigation includes Nebraska’s impermissible use of experts running special teams drills. Analysts are not among the 10 full-time on-field assistants and are not allowed to speak with players.

A year ago, the NCAA disallowed organized workouts because of the pandemic. According to the report, Nebraska allegedly relocated its strength workouts to an undisclosed off-campus location to avoid detection at the direction of NU’s strength and conditioning staff.

Frost and former Nebraska athletic director Bill Moos had been vocal in wanting to play in 2020 after the Big Ten initially canceled its season. The Big Ten reversed course and set up an eight-game conference-only schedule starting in late October.

LLWS returns, but without fans, international teams

Associated Press

The Little League World Series is back. There won’t be international teams or 22,000 fans in the stands when the championship rolls around, but the tournament in South Williamsport, Pa., is set to start Thursday.

The coronavirus forced the cancellation of the tournament in 2020, and this year, the delta variant surge resulted in Little League tournaments for several older age groups being scrapped. But what most fans understand as the Little League World Series, featuring 10- to 12-year-old players, will take place over the next week and a half, with the championship set for Lamade Stadium on Aug. 29.

“It won’t be the same as what they’ve seen on TV and from years past, but I told them, ‘I don’t care if there’s 10,000 people or 10, you shouldn’t have any problem getting up to play here,’” said Dustin Rader, manager of Nebraska’s Hastings Little League team, the top club in the Midwest region.

“I think they’re just really excited for the opportunity.”

Though there won’t be fans packing the hill at Lamade Stadium, those close to the players can still see them in action. Each team will receive 250 game passes to distribute to friends, families and community members.

Instead of splitting 16 teams into U.S. and international brackets, Little League’s championship tournament will feature strictly American squads in 2021 because of COVID-19 and the international travel restrictions the pandemic brought about. Typically, eight teams from different geographic regions represent the United States, with the rest of the world broken into another eight regions.

This year, each U.S. region’s champion and runner-up moved on, instead of just the champ. Though manager Ben Ludwig’s Upper Providence Little League team, northwest of Philadelphia, won the Mid-Atlantic region outright, he feels good about letting the so-called B teams participate.

“I think Little League is doing the right thing and everything they can do to make it

as good of an experience as possible,” Ludwig said. “A 16-team tournament is more robust, so I think it’s great what they’ve done here to expand it out, given the circumstances.”

Ludwig and company are well-prepared for adverse situations. His team lost its second game of the Pennsylvania state tournament, meaning it had to win five games in five days to advance to the Mid-Atlantic tournament.

His group succeeded, leading Ludwig to believe they’re equipped for elite competition.

“Based on what we just went through, it seems like ‘all right, this is going to be nothing out of the ordinary,’” Ludwig said. “It’s going to be something that our kids are ready for, and they’re going to step up to the challenge.”

Other teams, like Florida’s Martin County North Little League, took advantage of the expanded U.S. bracket. Manager Mark Rodgers’ team finished runner-up to Tennessee’s Nolensville Little League.