

Biden sticks to Aug. 31 airlift deadline

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden has decided to stick with his Aug. 31 deadline for completing the U.S.-led evacuation from Afghanistan, an administration official said Tuesday. The decision reflects in part the U.S. military's concern about heightened security threats to the massive airlift that began Aug. 14.

A Taliban spokesman, speaking prior to word of Biden's decision, reiterated that the militant group would oppose any extension of the deadline. It has allowed the airlift to continue without major interference.

Pressure from U.S. allies and both Democratic and Republican lawmakers, veterans groups and refugee organizations has grown for Biden to extend his deadline, which he set well before the Taliban completed its lightning takeover of Afghanistan on Aug. 15. It remains unclear whether the airlift from Kabul's international airport can get out all American citizens and other foreigners by then, as well as former military and translators and other at-risk Afghans who fear for their lives under Taliban rule.

Some Republicans bristled Tuesday at

the U.S. seeming to comply with a Taliban edict.

"We need to have the top priority to tell the Taliban that we're going to get all of our people out, regardless of what timeline was initially set," said Rep. Steve Scalise, R-La.

Biden asked his national security team to create contingency plans in case a situation arose for which the deadline needed to be extended slightly, the official said.

The Washington Post reported the Pentagon is preparing a contingency plan, should the evacuation mission not be completed on schedule.

The U.S. has repeatedly stressed the risk of continuing the airlift, due to threats of violence by the Islamic State group's Afghanistan affiliate.

Germany's top military commander, Gen. Eberhard Zorn, said Tuesday the United States and Germany were particularly concerned about ISIS suicide bombers possibly slipping into crowds in Kabul.

The U.S. ramped up its round-the-clock airlift of evacuees from Afghanistan to its highest level yet on Tuesday. About 21,600 people were flown out in the 24-hour period that ended early Tuesday, the White House

said. That compares with about 16,000 the previous day.

Thirty-seven U.S. military flights — 32 C-17s and 5 C-130s — carried about 12,700 evacuees. An additional 8,900 people flew out aboard 57 flights by U.S. allies.

Biden had considered whether to extend his self-imposed deadline, taking into account the continued security threats by extremist groups in the Afghan capital, the Taliban's resistance to an extension and the prospect that not all Americans and at-risk Afghan allies can be evacuated by next Tuesday.

At a news conference in Kabul, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said Tuesday his group will accept "no extensions" of the deadline.

Later Tuesday, the chief Pentagon spokesman, John Kirby, said the military will need "at least several days" to fully withdraw its several thousand troops and their equipment from Kabul.

He said commanders are still aiming to leave by Aug. 31. He said there is enough time to get all Americans out but was less specific about completing the evacuation of all at-risk Afghans.

Troops in Qatar running on fumes amid evacuations

By CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

American service members at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar are starting to feel the strain from their extraordinary efforts in the mass evacuation from Afghanistan, prompting comrades elsewhere in U.S. Central Command to assist in the airlifts.

Social media posts provided a glimpse of the toll the operation is taking on service members, civilian personnel and contractors processing the thousands arriving in Qatar.

"Been doing this 12-16 (hours), no days off since the s--t hit the fan," one Facebook user wrote on a page for Al Udeid residents. "Now I love the fact I'm helping people and I wouldn't know what to do if I was in (their) shoes, but I just want some real rest ... cause I'm shutting down slowly. ... I'm mf TIRED ok."

The United States evacuated over 10,000 people in one 24-hour period earlier this week, the military said Monday. Cargo jets were being loaded with 400 to 450 passengers at a time.

One base resident had worked 22-hour days for three days straight, he told Stars and Stripes by text message Monday. That includes 10 hours a day volunteering.

Some 10th Mountain Division soldiers who deployed on short notice from Fort Polk, La., over the weekend were put straight to work after arriving at approximately 4 a.m., said the resident, who asked not to be named because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

There are not enough translators, and ice to keep water cool was running low as evacuees were arriving to 120-degree temperatures, he

said.

"We (are) going through a lot of water bottles," he said.

A post on the popular Facebook group "Air Force amn/nco/snco" late Monday quoted a submission from someone who said it took 30 hours to bring in a group of over 450 evacuees on one flight. The plane circled for two hours before landing because of how packed the base was.

"To give these people a new chance at life (it) was worth it," the person wrote. "Guys in (Al Udeid) are still swamped right now."

Military chaplains were "in the thick of it to make sure our airmen can keep pressing," the base's Victory Chapel said in a post featuring a photo of cases of sports drinks and energy drinks that were being delivered throughout the base.

Taliban takeover prompts al-Qaida fears

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The lightning-fast changes in Afghanistan are forcing the Biden administration to confront the prospect of a resurgent al-Qaida, the group that attacked America on Sept. 11, 2001, at the same time the U.S. is trying to stanch violent extremism at home and cyberattacks from Russia and China.

With the rapid withdrawal of U.S. forces and rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, “I think al-Qaida has an opportunity, and they’re going to take advantage of that opportunity,” says Chris Costa, who was senior director for counterterrorism in the

Trump administration.

“This is a galvanizing event for jihadists everywhere.”

Al-Qaida’s ranks have been significantly diminished by 20 years of war in Afghanistan, and it’s far from clear that the group has the capacity in the near future to carry out catastrophic attacks on America such as the 9/11 strikes, especially given how the U.S. has fortified itself in the past two decades with surveillance and other protective measures.

But a June report from the U.N. Security Council said the group’s senior leadership remains present inside Afghanistan, along with hundreds of

armed operatives. It noted that the Taliban, who sheltered al-Qaida fighters before the Sept. 11 attacks, “remain close, based on friendship, a history of shared struggle, ideological sympathy and intermarriage.”

President Joe Biden has spoken repeatedly of what he calls an “over-the-horizon capability” that he says will enable the U.S. to keep track of terrorism threats from afar. His national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, told reporters Monday that Biden has been clear that counterterrorism capabilities have evolved to the point where the threat can be suppressed without a strong boots-on-the-

ground presence.

The U.S. is also presumably anticipating that strengthened airport screening and more sophisticated surveillance can be more effective than 20 years ago in thwarting an attack. But experts worry that intelligence-gathering capabilities needed as an early-warning system against an attack will be negatively affected by the troop withdrawal.

The concern is resonant enough that Biden administration officials told Congress last week that, based on the evolving situation, they now believe terror groups like al-Qaida may be able to grow much faster than expected.

Maskless partygoers prompt probe at air base in South Korea

By DAVID CHOI

Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The U.S. military in South Korea is investigating videos showing dozens of people dancing close together, without masks at a club on an air base on Saturday night.

Videos posted to Instagram and TikTok show military personnel drinking and dancing during a club-like event at the Enlisted Club at Osan Air Base in Pyeongtaek, roughly 30 miles from Seoul.

Service members, according to the current policy imposed by U.S. Forces Korea, are required to wear masks in all indoor common areas on military facilities to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

USFK spokesman Col. Lee Peters in an emailed statement

Tuesday said the command was aware of the event and was still “gathering all the facts and pertinent information.”

Peters said USFK-affiliated personnel, which include civilian employees and family members, need to “conduct themselves appropriately while following all ... mitigation measures — both on and off installation — at all times.”

U.S. service members are instructed to adhere to local public health laws in addition to several USFK prohibitions, which include an ongoing ban on bars and clubs throughout the peninsula.

Maskless parties hosted at U.S. facilities in December prompted the temporary closure of buildings at Osan and Camp Humphreys, the largest U.S. military base overseas.

Okinawa-based sailor arrested on suspicion of drunken driving

**By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND MARI HIGA**

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — An Okinawa-based U.S. Navy sailor was arrested over the weekend on suspicion of drunken driving after Japanese police responded to reports of a hit-and-run crash.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Emanuel Ramirez Pecina, 22, assigned to the III Marine Expeditionary Force at Camp Hansen, was arrested at 6:55 a.m. Saturday in Naha city after he was pulled over by police and found to be under the influence of alcohol, a Naha police spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone Monday.

Police searching for a suspect in an earlier hit-and-run noticed Pecina’s vehicle was damaged, the spokesman said. “We are investigating his involvement with

the hit-and-run,” the spokesman said.

The hit-and-run happened at 4:10 a.m. when a vehicle hit a taxi and fled the scene, the spokesman said. No injuries were reported from the incident.

After he was pulled over, Pecina admitted drinking the night before but denied that he was still intoxicated, the spokesman said.

A breath test measured his blood alcohol content at 0.12%, four times Japan’s legal limit of 0.03%. For comparison, all 50 U.S. states have set 0.08% as the legal limit for driving under the influence or driving while impaired.

The incident is “currently under investigation,” III MEF spokesman Capt. Gabriel Adibe told Stars and Stripes via email Tuesday. The command is “fully cooperating with local authorities.”

NY governor vows to restore faith in leaders

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — Kathy Hochul became the first female governor of New York on Tuesday, vowing to bring new energy and urgency to solving immense challenges as she took over an administration criticized for inaction during Andrew Cuomo's distracted final months in office.

Hochul, a Democrat and former member of Congress from western New York, took the oath of office just after midnight in a brief, private event overseen by the state's chief judge, Janet DiFiore.

At another, ceremonial swearing-in Tuesday morning at the New York State Capitol, Hochul promised a "fresh, collaborative approach" in state government.

"I want people to believe in their government again. It's important to me that people have faith," she said.

She noted that she'd already begun speaking with other Democratic leaders who have, for years, complained about being shut out of key decisions and bullied by Cuomo, including New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio.

"There'll be no blindsiding, there'll just be full cooperation," Hochul said.

Hochul also thanked her "big Irish Catholic" family, including her two children and Bill Hochul, her husband of over 30 years. Her immediate family sat in the front row, wearing masks and spaced slightly apart. Hochul, her daughter and daughter-in law wore white to honor suf-

fragists who fought for voting rights.

Over the next few months, Hochul, who was a little-known figure as lieutenant governor, will have an opportunity to reshape the way power works in Albany, where Cuomo dominated decision-making for years before being felled in a sexual harassment scandal.

For generations, it's been said that all of the real decisions in the state government were made by "three men in a room" — the governor and the leaders of the state Senate and Assembly.

Now, for the first time in state history, two of those three — Hochul and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins — are women. Only the state Assembly is led by a man — Speaker Carl Heastie.

House Dem leaders offer budget deal to moderates

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Compromising with moderates, House Democratic leaders were set to try again Tuesday to muscle President Joe Biden's multitrillion-dollar budget blueprint over a key hurdle, hoping to end a standoff that halted proceedings and risked upending their domestic infrastructure agenda.

Tensions flared overnight as a band of moderate lawmakers threatened to withhold their votes for the \$3.5 trillion plan. They were demanding the House first approve a nearly \$1 trillion bipartisan package of road, power grid, broadband and other public works projects that's already passed the Senate.

Early Tuesday, House leaders surveyed support for a potential compromise. It would set a Sept. 27 date to consider the bipartisan package, giving moderates the assurance they want, according to a Democratic leadership aide granted anonymity to discuss the ongoing negotiations.

The potential compromise attempts to meet the concerns of moderates that the bipartisan package won't be left on the sidelines, but also stays in line with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's insistence that the two bills move together as a more complete package of Biden's priorities. Pelosi has set a goal of passing both by Oct. 1.

House Democrats huddled privately as a caucus and votes were not yet set, but expected later Tuesday afternoon.

"We're legislating," Pelosi told reporters Monday night.

The new strategy comes after a turbulent late night at the Capitol and signals the power even a handful of voices can have in setting policy and agenda in the narrowly divide chamber, where Pelosi has few votes to spare.

What was supposed to be a quick session as lawmakers returned to work for a few days in August devolved into a dramatic display of differences between the moderates and progressive lawmakers over the best

way to tackle Biden's big rebuilding agenda.

Pelosi had implored Democrats during a private caucus Monday not to bog down and miss this chance to deliver on the promises Biden and the party have made to Americans.

"Right now, we have an opportunity to pass something so substantial for our country, so transformative we haven't seen anything like it," Pelosi said, according to a person who requested anonymity to disclose the private comments.

With Republicans fully opposed to the president's big plans, the Democratic leaders were trying to engineer a way out of a potentially devastating standoff between the party's moderate and progressive wings that risks Biden's agenda.

Inserting his own wedge into the politics of the situation, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday on Fox News that he was rooting for the House moderates.

"I wish the moderates in the House success," McConnell said.

Japan seeks support with nuclear plant water release

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan's government adopted an interim plan Tuesday that it hopes will win support from fishermen and other concerned groups for a planned release into the sea of treated but still radioactive water from the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant.

The government decided in April to start discharging the water into the Pacific Ocean in the spring of 2023 after building a facility and compiling release plans under safety requirements set by regulators. The idea has been fiercely opposed by fishermen, residents and Japan's neighbors.

Under the plan adopted Tuesday, the government will set up a fund to buy fisheries products and freeze them for temporary storage to cushion the impact from negative rumors about the discharge. The government will also help promote Fukushima products to restaurants and other food industries.

Survivors coping after deadly Tenn. flood

Associated Press

WAVERLY, Tenn. — Anna Mays woke up in a panic attack Monday, thinking she was back in the rising floodwater.

Two days before, she had been clinging for her life to the front door of her duplex in rural Tennessee as the water inched up to her neck. Her brother was hanging onto a tree.

Then Mays realized where she was: The gym at the Waverly Church of Christ, now her temporary home alongside other victims of record-breaking rain Saturday that sent floodwaters surging through the region, killing at least 22 people.

Her story has become a familiar one in Humphreys County, and particularly the small town of

Waverly. Large swaths of the community are suddenly displaced, sorting through difficult decisions about what comes next even as they relive the horror of what just happened.

"This morning I was having a panic attack and thought I was in water, and I was trying to get that way and trying to get this way. I was just scared half to death," said Mays, who doesn't know how to swim. "I was just, something woke me up and I thought I was in the water, and — I never have seen — I've seen it on TV, but I've never have seen it like it in life, where cars was going by."

On Tuesday, President Joe Biden approved a major disaster declaration for the state, freeing up federal aid to help with recovery efforts.

ery efforts.

Mays started getting belongings after a police officer came to her duplex Saturday morning, telling her to evacuate. She and her brother could see the water rising quickly. Her brother was trying to keep it out of the house by shoving towels under the door, but they were soon overwhelmed. Minutes later, the flooded creek pushed the door open and water poured into the house.

Mays' brother went outside to try to find a way onto the roof but ended up clinging to a tree. Mays held onto the front door until they were rescued by boat, escaping with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. Mays said the neighbor on the other side of the duplex lost her daughter, who

was about 7 or 8 years old.

While survivors grappled with their recollections — more than 90 people stayed in shelters Sunday, according to the state's American Red Cross chapter — rescue workers continued their arduous searches for anyone else swept away.

Authorities rummaged through heaps of debris as search and rescue teams used dogs to try to sniff out any missing people, Waverly police Chief Grant Gillespie said.

"There's still a lot of debris in and along the creek that needs to be examined. That's a painstaking process," Gillespie said during a news conference. "We have to tear that apart, a lot of times, with equipment."

Harris rebukes China over South China Sea

Associated Press

SINGAPORE — Vice President Kamala Harris delivered a sharp rebuke to China for its incursions in the South China Sea, warning its actions there amount to "coercion" and "intimidation" and affirming that the United States will support its allies in the region against Beijing's advances.

"We know that Beijing continues to coerce, to intimidate and to make claims to the vast majority of the South China Sea," she said in a foreign policy speech Tuesday in Singapore in which she laid out the Biden administration's vision for the Indo-Pacific. "Beijing's actions continue to undermine the rules-based order and threaten the sovereignty of nations."

Harris, who is on a swing through Southeast Asia, declared that the U.S. "stands with our allies and our partners" in the face of threats from China.

The speech sought to cement the U.S. commitment to sup-

porting its allies in an area of growing importance to the Biden administration, which has made countering China's influence globally a centerpiece of its foreign policy.

And it came during a critical moment for the U.S., as the Biden administration seeks to further solidify its pivot toward Asia while America's decades-long focus on the Mideast comes to a messy end with the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Her rebuke to Beijing amounted to her sharpest comments yet on the U.S. foe. And China hit back, with Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin invoking Afghanistan in his response to a question about Harris' comments, saying the messy withdrawal from Kabul showed the U.S. had lost credibility. He charged that the U.S. "can smear, suppress, coerce and bully other countries at will in order to maintain America first, without paying any price."

Cleanup begins in Northeast as Henri plods back to sea

Associated Press

MONROE TOWNSHIP, N.J. — Residents across the waterlogged Northeast began clearing mud and tearing out sodden carpets Monday after deluges dropped by Tropical Storm Henri, whose remnants threatened further flooding in New England as the system made a slow trek back to the sea.

The smell of sewage filled the air as residents of Rossmoor, a retirement community in central New Jersey's Monroe Township, returned to soaked homes and ruined possessions after Henri turned their streets into rivers.

Roseann and John Kiernan said they'd have to likely tear up walls and carpets, toss their appliances and replace their car after their house filled with nearly 2 feet of water on Sunday.

"This is what we were left with. Nothing, nothing," lamented Roseann Kiernan. "They told us that everything has to go."

A few miles away from Monroe, the whirring of portable

pumps split the air on the main street in Jamesburg, another hard-hit New Jersey community.

Luke Becker, who operates the Four Boys ice cream stand along with his three brothers — one of six the family owns — said nearly 4 feet of water rushed into the shop, dislodging a tall cooler and leaving 3 inches of mud behind.

"We were initially hoping to be back open by Labor Day, but now it looks like we've got to go through all the plumbing and rip out a ton of electrical because we don't know how much of that was affected," he said. "Right now there's really no timetable."

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy toured the storm-ravaged towns Monday, which remained under a flood warning until midnight.

Henri spared coastal areas of New York and New England major damage when its center made landfall Sunday in Rhode Island. But its size and slow speed led to deluges in areas from Maine to Pennsylvania.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Gas station robbery halted by armed person

DE NEWARK — Police said a robber armed with a knife found himself confronted by a bystander with a gun at a Delaware gas station.

A man entered the store, displayed a knife and demanded money. The worker gave the man an undisclosed amount of cash.

Delaware State Police said the robber then fled the store but was confronted by a witness armed with a gun. Police said the witness held the man briefly at gunpoint and caused the robber to drop some of the cash.

The suspect was then able to return to his car and fled in a blue sedan.

Former sheriff gets 3 years for conviction

AL MONTGOMERY — A judge handed down a three-year sentence to a former Alabama sheriff removed from office after he was convicted of theft and ethics violations.

Former Limestone County Sheriff Mike Blakely, 70, was convicted of taking no-interest loans from a jail fund that held prisoners' money and of stealing \$4,000 from his campaign account.

Blakely, first elected in 1983, served 10 terms in office. He was automatically removed from office after being convicted of a felony.

Instead of prison, Blakely will get to serve the sentence in a county jail. Judge Pam Baschab, however, specified that it will not be at the Limestone County Jail that Blakely ran for decades.

County charges man in overdose death

TN BLOUNTVILLE — A Virginia man has been arrested in an overdose death that occurred last year in Tennessee, officials said.

Anthony Lateze Robinson, 34, of Bristol, Va., was charged in a Sullivan County indictment with second-degree murder and two counts of sale and delivery of fentanyl, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation said in a news release.

The charges stem from the death on Aug. 9, 2020, of Christopher Robin Hurley, 39, who collapsed at his place of work in Sullivan County, the TBI said. He was taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead, the release said.

An autopsy revealed Hurley died from fentanyl toxicity, the release said. Authorities have alleged that Robinson was responsible for providing fentanyl to Hurley.

Golf Association worker charged in scheme

PA PHILADELPHIA — A former United States Golf Association employee has been charged in a scheme to embezzle funds from the unauthorized sale of U.S. Open Championship tickets, Acting United States Attorney Jennifer Arbibittier Williams announced.

According to a statement released by Williams, Robert Fryer, 39, of Perkasi, Pa., faces conspiracy, wire fraud and mail fraud charges.

Fryer allegedly used his position ahead of the 2013 U.S. Open held at the Merion Golf Club in Ardmore, Pa., through the 2019

U.S. Open held at the Pebble Beach Golf Links in Pebble Beach, Calif., to obtain 23,000 tickets that he sold to third-party ticket brokers for nearly \$1 million.

The face value of the tickets is over \$3 million.

Ex-radar base might become tourist spot

MI EAGLE HARBOR — A group of Michigan Tech University alumni have submitted the winning bid for a former U.S. Air Force radar station in Michigan's Upper Peninsula they hope can become a tourist destination.

The bid last week was \$227,000, The Daily Mining Gazette reported, citing a statement from Keweenaw County, which controls the property.

The former base, which has more than 100 acres in Eagle Harbor Township, is known locally as Mount Horace Greeley. For nearly 40 years, it served as a radar station during the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

The winning bidder was identified as Zach Garner of Perry, who said he submitted an offer on behalf of himself and Michigan Tech alumni who are engineers. The school is 30 miles away in Houghton.

The goal is to address any environmental issues at the former base, employ local residents and turn the land into a tourism spot, the letter that accompanied the bid stated.

Ex-police captain faces child porn charges

MA BELCHERTOWN — A retired Massachusetts State Police captain

has been arrested on child pornography charges, the state attorney general's office announced.

Francis Hart, 60, of Amherst, was arraigned in Eastern Hampshire District Court and pleaded not guilty to two counts of possession of child pornography.

Hart was arrested at his home in Amherst. During a search, police seized digital devices that they said contained images of child pornography, according to Attorney General Maura Healey's office.

State Police began investigating in January after getting a tip that an email address registered to Hart had uploaded a file with numerous images of child pornography, Healey's office said.

Town celebrates 200 years of floating bridge

VT BROOKFIELD — A small Vermont community is celebrating the 200th birthday of its iconic floating bridge.

The Brookfield Floating Bridge is the only one in the East and one of few such bridges in the country, WCAX-TV reported.

The current bridge is the eighth construction of the span across Sunset Lake.

The first bridge was built in 1820, made out of logs chained together. The bridge has been rebuilt over the years as needed and is no longer made out of logs. It closes in the winter.

Brookfield is celebrating the bridge's 200 years with displays around town with thousands of pictures of the bridge from the historical society.

— From wire reports

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Resurgent Votto powers Reds in race

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — In the midst of a sensational, homer-crashing career resurgence, Joey Votto talked recently about getting his 2,000th hit.

The 37-year-old Reds first baseman recalled how he had the ball from his first major league hit in 2007, but gave it to his dog Maris to play with a few years later. Then he wondered aloud in the interview whether in hindsight that was a good decision because it might not be healthy for dogs to chew on baseballs.

That led him to reassure reporters and dog lovers everywhere not to worry as he'd been a loving owner to the retriever-mix rescue, who has since gone on to doggy heaven.

"It was chewed up and spit out by him," Votto said. "And he loved it, by the way."

It was Joey being Joey.

Back to the milestone hit, a solid single up the middle in a victory over the Chicago Cubs on Aug. 16, the continuation of an impressive Votto outburst since the All-Star

Break during which he's hit .320 and led the majors in homers (17) and RBIs (41).

"I was really happy with the 2,000th hit, because before the at-bat, I wanted to make sure my uniform looked good, my socks looked good. I made sure that way, if there's a highlight, at least I look my best," Votto said, maybe kidding, maybe not.

His homer total of 28 — the most since he hit 36 in 2017 — is even more improbable considering he was sidelined for most of May with a broken thumb.

He returned June 8 to hit .293 for the month, then hit .393 with 11 homers in July. He continues to burnish his Hall of Fame credentials, becoming only the second player in major league history to collect his 2,000th hit, 300th home run and 1,000th RBI in the same season. (Hall of Famer Billy Williams did it with the Cubs in 1971.)

"Joey Votto, every night, he does something cool," said Reds second baseman Jonathan India, who is making a case for National League Rookie of the Year.

Votto and those around him said they saw

the change coming. He started retooling his swing and his approach late last season, standing up straighter in the box, swinging at more pitches, consciously trying to hit the ball out and being comfortable striking out more.

"It sounds ridiculous, but I almost feel like I've relearned how to hit, and I've really, really enjoyed the fruits of that discovery," Votto said.

The 2010 NL MVP, who turns 38 on Sept. 10, insisted he doesn't think about his legacy and will walk away from the game when he's no longer competitive. He's more concerned with earning his huge paycheck and convincing the organization and fans that he's still worth it. The \$251.5 million, 12-year deal he signed in 2012 pays him \$25 million this season.

"He's completely into what he's doing right now," Reds manager David Bell said. "He loves playing the game, he believes in what we're doing as a team and he's getting to enjoy it with a lot of other players and a team that just enjoys each other."

Yankees push win streak to 10, end Braves' run at 9

Associated Press

ATLANTA — In a historic matchup between two of baseball's hottest teams, the New York Yankees kept right on rolling.

Giancarlo Stanton homered and drove in three runs to carry the Yankees to their 10th straight victory, cooling off the streaking Atlanta Braves 5-1 on Monday night.

New York snapped the first-place Braves' own nine-game winning streak in the first regular-season matchup in almost 120 years between teams that had won at least nine in a row.

"We like winning," Gary Sánchez, who drove in the Yankees' other two runs, said through an interpreter. "Winning is fun."

Stanton homered in the second inning off Huascar Ynoa (4-3) and snapped a 1-1 tie in the sixth with a two-out, two-run double.

"He's a unicorn," manager Aaron Boone said. "He does

things every night that are a little bit different than everybody else."

Sánchez gave New York some insurance with another two-out hit in the eighth, singling through the shift to bring home two more runs.

Cubs 6, Rockies 4: Rafael Ortega hit a walk-off home run in the bottom of the ninth inning and Chicago ended its longest home losing streak with a win over Colorado.

Pinch-hitter Jason Heyward started the ninth with a single, and Ortega came up an out later and hit the game's only homer to right as the Cubs scored five runs in the final two innings to snap a 13-game losing streak at Wrigley Field, the longest in franchise history.

Reliever David Bard (7-9) allowed the game-winner after a walk-filled eighth inning helped Chicago to get closer.

Royals 7, Astros 1: Whit Merrifield had three hits and three

RBIs, Salvador Perez extended a career high with his 33rd homer and Kansas City won at Houston for its seventh win in eight games.

Merrifield had an RBI double in the seventh inning and drove in two more with a triple in the Royals' three-run eighth.

Blue Jays 2, White Sox 1: Pinch-runner Breyvic Valera scored the tiebreaking run on a wild pitch in the eighth inning, and host Toronto beat Chicago.

Valera ran for Reese McGuire after the Blue Jays catcher singled off Craig Kimbrel (2-4) to begin the inning. Valera took second on a wild third strike to Bo Bichette, advanced to third on a groundout and scored when Kimbrel uncorked another wild pitch, this time to Teoscar Hernández.

Mariners 5, Athletics 3: Jake Bauers hit a tiebreaking, two-run single with two outs in the ninth inning as Oakland closer Lou Trivino struggled again,

and visiting Seattle rallied to a win.

Ty France hit a tying homer off Trivino (5-6) to start the ninth, handing Trivino his second straight blown save after converting 14 in a row.

Red Sox 8, Rangers 4 (11): Travis Shaw hit a game-ending grand slam in the 11th inning, and host Boston beat Texas.

Shaw, who entered as a defensive replacement in the eighth, drove a 3-2 pitch off Dennis Santana (2-3) over the Red Sox's bullpen. It was Shaw's first hit since he was claimed off waivers from Milwaukee on Aug. 15.

Pirates 6, Diamondbacks 5: Yoshi Tsutsugo homered and Bryan Reynolds tripled in the seventh to help host Pittsburgh beat Arizona for its third win in four games.

Pirates reliever Anthony Banda (2-0) struck out the side in the eighth. David Bednar retired the side in order in the ninth for his second major league save.

Finau wins in playoff, ends 5-year slump

Associated Press

JERSEY CITY, N.J. — Tony Finau was developing a label as the player who did everything right but win. What he never lost was his belief he could beat the best.

That moment finally arrived late Monday afternoon at The Northern Trust against the sunlit backdrop of the Manhattan skyline. Finau delivered the best back nine of his career to track down Jon Rahm, the world's No. 1 player, and then beat Cameron Smith in a playoff.

Finau tapped in the winning par putt at Liberty National, tilted his head to the sky and flut-

tered his lips in a sigh that was equal parts relief and satisfaction.

"It's more massive I think for just my sense of accomplishment," he said. "It's hard losing, and it's hard losing in front of the world. I've done it already a couple of times this year. That made me more hungry. If it doesn't discourage you, it makes you more hungry. You guys keep telling me, 'When are you going to win again?' That makes me more hungry."

"It all equals up to now. It was time for me to win again."

In a rain-delayed start to the FedEx Cup playoffs, with players sitting out Sunday as Hurri-

cane Henri moved off the eastern seaboard, Finau ended a drought that had stretched more than five years and 142 starts on the PGA Tour.

He had eight runner-up finishes, three of them playoff losses, and 39 top 10s since his lone victory in the Puerto Rico Open in the spring of 2016.

That ended with a dynamic charge, starting with a birdie-eagle-birdie stretch for a 30 on the back nine to close with a 6-under 65. And like most victories on this tour, he needed plenty of help.

Rahm, who had a two-shot lead at the turn, made his first bogey of the final round on the

15th hole and then had to settle for par on the reachable par-4 16th, which felt like a bogey. He had to settle for a 69 to finish alone in third.

Smith had a big finish of his own with two straight birdies and a chance at three in a row with a 25-foot putt on the 18th for the win. He missed and shot 67, and that was as close as the Australian came to winning.

Returning to the 18th in the playoff, Finau pounded his drive down the middle. Smith pushed his drive so wild to the right that it sailed over the retaining wall that separates Liberty National from the edge of the Hudson River.

Bruning becomes a big name for Little League

Associated Press

SOUTH WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. — Ella Bruning has become the person everyone wants to talk to in South Williamsport this week.

The starting catcher for the Wylie Little League team from Abilene, Texas, is the 20th female to play in the Little League World Series and the only girl to compete in this year's tournament. She can hit, pitch, steal bases and take a foul ball on the knee.

In Texas's 6-0 win over Washington on Friday, she stole second, scored the first run and led the team with two hits and an RBI, becoming just the third girl to have a multi-hit game in the Little League World Series.

"She's a role model for my daughter and a bunch of the younger sisters on this team," Texas manager Reggie Regala said. "She's always been that way, and now that she's on this big stage, she's a huge role model for girls everywhere."

Baseball is a family affair in the Bruning household. Ella's father, Bryan, has coached his children for more than 10 years and is an assistant on the Abilene squad. Her younger brother Dillon is an outfielder and second baseman for the team. Their older brother, Collin, sits in the stands and cheers, admittedly jealous that his teams missed out on this opportunity a few years ago.

Ella's baseball story began with shagging batting practice balls in the outfield for Collin's team when she was 7 years old.

"I think she caught a line drive one day and some of the boys teased her about being on the team," Ella's mom, Lindi, recalled. "From that point, it was always a joke that she would play and, eventually, she did."

Her toughness behind the plate has been documented over the course of the week. After taking a foul ball to the knee on Monday afternoon in a 6-5 loss to Michigan, she stayed in the game and blocked the next three pitches off her chest in the dirt with perfect form.

"She has always been pretty natural and likes the competition that the league provides," Lindi said.

Ella's success is not only limited to the baseball field — she's a softball star, too.

But she dropped softball for the summer to join the Abilene team in its pursuit of the LLWS. The adjustment from underhand to overhand pitching was a challenge for her, but she knew how high the stakes were. And she struck out a pair of batters on the mound in a regional matchup against Louisiana.

"We knew this (year) was our biggest shot to go this far," Ella said. "This is once in a lifetime. I have softball for the rest of my life, so I can do this for one year and go right back."

Big Ten, Pac-12, ACC will align on scheduling, plans

Associated Press

The Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten and Pac-12 announced an alliance Tuesday that will work together "on a collaborative approach surrounding the future evolution of college athletics and scheduling" with a clear eye on the growing power of the SEC.

Conference officials have been discussing the idea for weeks, but commissioners Kevin Warren of the Big Ten, Jim Phillips of the ACC and George Kliavkoff of the Pac-12 — all relatively new to their positions — acknowledged the plan publicly for the first time.

The move comes less than a month after the Southeastern Conference invited Texas and Oklahoma to join the league and create a 16-school league by 2025. The move sent shockwaves through college athletics and will leave the Big 12 without its two premier schools in the payday sport of football.

The ACC, Big Ten and Pac-12 hope its alliance of 41 schools that span from Miami to Seattle leads to stability at the top of big-time college sports and thwarts future realignment.

The alliance is also being formed as the NCAA begins the process of handing off more responsibility to conferences and schools to run college sports, and with a proposal to expand the College Football Playoff in the pipeline.

Winston TDs highlight Saints' win over Jags

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Jameis Winston picked opportune moments to let it fly in first NFL start since 2019.

Winston completed touchdown passes of 43 and 29 yards to second-year pro Marquez Callaway, and the Saints defeated the Jacksonville Jaguars 23-21 in a preseason game Monday night.

"Everybody knows Jameis has got a good arm," Callaway said. "He's going to throw it to where we can make a play."

Winston completed nine of 10 passes for 123 yards without an interception, bolstering his candidacy to succeed NFL all-time leading passer Drew Brees as the Saints' new starter.

"I haven't started a football game in so long, man," Winston said. "So, I was so excited just to

get an opportunity to start and lead the pack."

While Winston lamented missing "the easiest throw of the night," he left the field confident that he made high-percentage throws and minimized the type of risk-taking that defined his last season in Tampa Bay, when his NFL-high 30 interceptions marred a campaign in which he also eclipsed 5,000 yards passing and connected on 33 TDs.

"I think I'm really good on decisions. I just got to get better on accuracy," Winston said. "As long as I'm executing the right way, my eyes are in the right place and I'm making the right decisions, I can live with it."

Winston is competing for the job with Taysom Hill, who went 3-1 as a starter while Brees was injured last season. Hill passed

for 138 yards and a touchdown against Jacksonville.

Saints coach Sean Payton declined to say how much more he needed to see before announcing a starter.

The Jaguars also have a quarterback competition.

No. 1 overall draft choice Trevor Lawrence got the start over incumbent Gardner Minshew and played the first half, going 14-for-23 for 113 yards behind an offensive line featuring three backups.

"We're not balanced right now," first-year Jaguars coach Urban Meyer said. "We've got to get our offensive line back and play better and run the ball ... There just wasn't much rhythm in the first half."

Lawrence led one scoring drive that ended with a field goal.

"I just got to get a little bit better at getting the ball out, taking completions and staying out of second-and-long and third-and-long," Lawrence said. "We've got to click a little bit more, still got some work to do ... but I think we're heading in the right direction."

Jaguars running back Travis Etienne left with what Meyer said was a sprained foot.

Callaway had the crowd gasping in amazement when they saw replays of his touchdowns. He snagged the first — his longer of the two — with a diving catch between two defenders after he'd been interfered with from behind by rookie Tyson Campbell.

His second TD came on a one-handed catch over his outside shoulder along the sideline.

Wentz among key trio back at Colts practice following injuries

Associated Press

WESTFIELD, Ind. — Carson Wentz got back to work with the Indianapolis Colts on Monday — and looked sharp.

Three-time All-Pro guard Quenton Nelson and center Ryan Kelly joined him at practice for the first time since late July.

Yes, all three starters returned from injuries, finally giving the Colts a glimpse of what they might look like at full strength. Wentz and Nelson hadn't worked out since having surgery in early August to remove bone fragments from their feet. Kelly had been out with a hyperextended left elbow. All three are expected to do limited work this week.

"It was a lot of fun, honestly," said Wentz, the new starting quarterback acquired from Philadelphia in a March trade. "I don't like watching practice, I'd much rather be doing it and it was fun. It was fun to get out there today and to not think about it a lot and just play ball. I came out of it very confident."

Colts coach Frank Reich and receiver Zach Pascal liked what they saw from Wentz, too, acknowledging that he appeared to be in sync with his teammates despite missing three weeks.

It's a promising sign after watching second-year quarterback Jacob Eason and rookie Sam Ehlinger, a sixth-round pick, split most of the first-team snaps in Wentz's absence. While both showed promise, each has also struggled at times — perhaps something to be expected given neither had thrown against an opposing NFL defense until Aug. 12. Veteran quarterback Brett Hundley has been third on the depth chart.

But Wentz's return three weeks after surgery and a week sooner than Reich anticipated might be the most promising indication Indy's offense could have the entire trio ready for the Sept. 12 season opener against Seattle.

More hurdles remain.

All three spent last week rehabbing behind the scenes, but must now demonstrate they can complete practices on successive days. Each, Reich said, will also be monitored closely between workouts. Nelson has never missed a start in his first three seasons and has told teammates and coaches he doesn't intend to start now.

The bigger question is Wentz, who has a long injury history and has been told by team officials not to rush the recovery.

Panthers will play it safe with McCaffrey

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Carolina Panthers coach Matt Rhule is playing it safe when it comes to Christian McCaffrey's playing time in the preseason.

Rhule said that while most of the team's starters will play about one half in Carolina's preseason finale Friday night against the Pittsburgh Steelers, the team's star running back will be "very, very limited" — if he even plays at all.

"He will take a lot of hits during the season, more so than anyone else out there on the field, so we will save his hits for the season," Rhule said following Carolina's practice Monday.

McCaffrey has not played in either of Carolina's preseason losses, with rookie Chuba Hubbard seeing the bulk of carries.

McCaffrey said he feels as if he got some of the absorbing blows during two joint practices each with the Baltimore Ravens and Indianapolis Colts.

"For sure, not only practicing against those guys, but our team practices pretty physical as well," McCaffrey said.