

## Pentagon: US troops killed in Kabul

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS

*Stars and Stripes*

U.S. service members were killed Thursday in two explosions outside the airport in Kabul, where U.S. and coalition forces have been evacuating tens of thousands of Americans and Afghans since the Taliban took control of the country nearly two weeks ago, Pentagon chief spokesman John Kirby said.

Kirby did not say how many troops were killed, though Fox News reported 12 dead including 11 Marines and one Navy medic.

"We can confirm that a number of U.S. service members were killed in today's complex attack at Kabul airport. A number of others are being treated for wounds," Kirby said in a statement. "We also know that a number of Afghans fell victim to this heinous attack."

The service members killed were the first combat-related deaths to happen in Afghanistan since Feb. 8, 2020, when Sgt. 1st Class Antonio Rodriguez was killed in Nangarhar province, according to the Army.

The first explosion happened near the airport's Abbey gate and caused "a number of U.S. and civilian casualties," Kirby tweeted earlier Thursday.

The explosion was followed by reports of gunfire, the State Department said in a security alert. The gate is one of three entrances to the airport where crowds of people had been gathered since last week to vie for evacuation flights.

The number of injuries and deaths caused by the explosions has been reported by various agencies to be as many as 60 wounded and 13 killed.

The second explosion happened shortly af-

ter the first one "at or near the Baron Hotel, a short distance from Abbey Gate," Kirby said.

Images of bloodied Afghan men walking or being carted in wheel barrows away from the scene of the blast have been circulating on Twitter.

President Joe Biden has been briefed on the explosion, a White House official told CNN.

The bombing is believed to have been a suicide mission, Reuters reported. Several nations had warned Thursday of a possible attack on the Kabul airport and urged people to avoid the airport.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid condemned the attacks in a tweet Thursday afternoon. Officials have not said who carried out the attacks, but Pentagon officials this week have been warning of possible threats by ISIS-K, an Afghanistan-based branch of the Islamic State terrorist group.

"The Islamic Emirate strongly condemns the bombing of civilians at Kabul airport, which took place in an area where U.S. forces are responsible for security," Mujahid wrote in a tweet translated from Arabic. "The Islamic Emirate is paying close attention to the security and protection of its people, and evil circles will be strictly stopped."

Since Aug. 14, the U.S. has evacuated approximately 95,700 Americans and Afghans who helped the U.S. during its nearly two decades in Afghanistan.

The U.S. sent thousands of troops to Kabul to assist with the evacuations and provide security at the airport.

There were 5,800 U.S. troops at the airport, though 400 were transported out of Kabul on Wednesday.

The attacks come after U.S. evacuation

numbers slowed down after three consecutive days of exceeding its goal of moving 5,000-9,000 people per day from Kabul.

Military aircraft lifted 5,100 people out of the country on Thursday, the White House said, compared to 11,200 people Tuesday, 12,700 on Monday, and 11,000 on Sunday.

The U.S. has said it will leave the country by Tuesday, a deadline that the Taliban has said must be met.

Kirby on Wednesday said the U.S. will continue evacuation operations until that date, but the military will need to start prioritizing troops and equipment.

As the deadline draws near, hopeful evacuees on the ground in Kabul have reported rumors of the U.S. ending evacuations by Saturday, but Kirby on Thursday denied the reports.

"Evacuation operations in Kabul will not be wrapping up in 36 hours," Kirby tweeted. "We will continue to evacuate as many people as we can until the end of the mission."

Kirby's tweet was sent before the reports of the explosions. It was not clear Thursday whether the explosions would affect evacuation efforts.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg condemned "the horrific terrorist attack" Thursday, tweeting "our priority remains to evacuate as many people to safety as quickly as possible."

NATO forces have been assisting the U.S. with the operations, flying thousands of evacuees out of the country each day.

On Thursday, 74 coalition aircraft moved 8,300 people from Kabul — besting the U.S.'s daily total, the White House said.

## Bases in Germany strain to take 10,000 more evacuees

By JENNIFER H. SVAN

*Stars and Stripes*

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — The U.S. military was struggling to support a surge of evacuees in Europe on Thursday as Afghans fled Kabul in what little time remained to escape Taliban rule.

More than 10,000 evacuees were destined for Ramstein on Thursday afternoon and overnight, the largest influx since the air base became the primary evacuation hub in

Europe.

"Our main challenge right now is flow," said Brig. Gen. Josh Olson, the 86th Airlift Wing commander. "We're continuing to struggle to have that outflow back into the U.S."

It was uncertain Thursday how many more Afghans would be able to fly from Kabul following bombings outside the airport that resulted in deaths and scores of injuries. But flights to Ramstein have continued

to bring evacuees in from elsewhere, including Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar.

In less than a week, Ramstein has transformed from an air base supporting European and African military operations into an international airport and city, Olson said.

More than 350 tents fill ramp space along the flight line, and all flight operations are part of the evacuation mission, with commercial carriers flying from Ramstein, base officials said.

# Pacific bases are ready to vaccinate

By JOSEPH DITZLER

*Stars and Stripes*

TOKYO—The U.S. military in Japan and South Korea is ready to carry out Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's order to inoculate all active-duty military members with the coronavirus vaccine, spokesmen for those commands said Thursday.

The Pfizer BioNTech vaccine, given full approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Monday, is in good supply at bases in South Korea and Japan, and both commands expect fur-

ther resupply.

"Yes, there are enough doses and incoming doses [are] on the way," Air Force Maj. Tom Barger of U.S. Forces Japan, headquartered at Yokota Air Base, said in an email to Stars and Stripes.

U.S. Forces Korea has "enough on-hand supplies of Pfizer to meet an initial demand until we are provided more vaccines" by the Defense Department, said Col. Lee Peters by email from Camp Humphreys. USFK "also possess an adequate

supply of Moderna if service members choose that vaccine over Pfizer."

Meanwhile, one U.S. base in Japan reported a new case of COVID-19 on Thursday. Sasebo Naval Base, on Kyushu Island, said the person tested positive Wednesday following close contact with another infected individual.

Japan reported another 24,317 new coronavirus cases Wednesday, and 45 people died of COVID-19 complications, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavi-

rus Resource Center. Nearly 43% of Japan's population, or 54.1 million people, are fully vaccinated.

About 70% of USFJ's uniformed personnel are fully vaccinated, according to Barger. He said many unvaccinated service members are rolling up their sleeves now that the shot is mandated by DOD.

USFK has not seen the same increase, according to Peters. But more than 80% of USFK service members and the "affiliated population" are vaccinated, he wrote.

## Vets with PTSD could get service dogs from VA

By NIKKI WENTLING

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Wednesday signed a bill into law that will allow some veterans with mental health conditions to receive service dogs.

The new law orders the Department of Veterans Affairs secretary to develop and launch a five-year pilot program that provides service dog training to benefit veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. Previously, the VA only covered some costs of service dogs for veterans with certain physical disabilities, such as blindness, hearing impairment and mobility is-

suues — but not mental health conditions.

Biden signed the bill in the Oval Office. Rep. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., who led the legislation through Congress, attended the ceremony.

"I've had the chance to visit with veterans and their service dogs in my district, and it couldn't be clearer how service dogs make life better for our veterans," Slotkin said in a statement Wednesday. "From waking them from PTSD-related nightmares, helping them open doors or finding an exit in a crowded space, it can be transformational."

The Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers for Veterans Therapy Act, or

PAWS Act, requires the VA to start the pilot program in early 2022, and it must be carried out by at least five VA medical centers. The facilities will partner with accredited service dog organizations to perform the training.

There's a chance the program could extend beyond five years. When the five years are up, the VA must report back to Congress about whether it should be extended or made permanent.

If it does continue, lawmakers will consider expanding the program to include veterans with mental health conditions other than PTSD.

## Okinawa governor condemns Marines for tainted water

By MATTHEW M. BURKE

AND MARI HIGA

*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER — The governor of Okinawa prefecture demanded the Marine Corps stop releasing potentially contaminated water into the public wastewater system, soon after the Marines started releasing it Thursday.

At a news conference in Naha, Gov. Denry Tamaki said he learned the Marines were releasing the water at about the time it was being done.

He said the Marines notified the prefec-

ture and Okinawa Defense Bureau by email at 9 a.m. that the water, which contains low levels of toxic organic compounds, was about to be released.

"It must have come as a shock for all stakeholders," Tamaki said, adding that disposal methods were supposed to be discussed that day. "This is totally unacceptable."

Representatives of the defense ministry and the U.S. military were scheduled to meet later Thursday to discuss results of July wastewater tests and disposal methods.

The water contains spilled firefighting

foam and is stored in underground tanks at Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. The Marine Corps treated the water prior to releasing it, but it still contains low levels of toxic PFOS and PFOA.

Once in the wastewater system, the water eventually reaches the ocean, according to a spokesman from the Okinawa Prefectural Enterprise Bureau, the agency responsible for the island's water quality.

A defense bureau spokesman said the bureau was informed just prior to the water's release. He declined further comment Thursday.

# Migrant kids spend weeks in US shelters

Associated Press

Five months after the Biden administration declared an emergency and raced to set up shelters to house a record number of children crossing the U.S.-Mexico border alone, kids continue to languish at the sites, while more keep coming, child welfare advocates say.

More than 700 children spent three weeks or longer at the government's unlicensed sites in mid-July, according to declarations filed with a federal court overseeing custody conditions for immigrant youth. Advocates have said that children should be released quickly to their relatives in the United States or sent to a licensed facility.

In one of the filings, a 16-year-old Salvadoran boy said chil-

dren were served raw meat. It took more than a month for the boy, who said he speaks with both his parents each week, to be released to his father in Georgia.

"When I wake up every day, I feel really frustrated. Of the youth that I arrived with, I am the last one here," the boy said in his declaration. "I would like to be home with my dad right now."

When the Biden administration erected the emergency sites in March to ease dangerous overcrowding at border stations, they were meant to be a temporary fix. But months later, some wonder whether that's still the case.

Border crossings by children without an adult in July neared the same levels they did in

March despite the summer heat.

"If you have a dinner party that you plan to have for three people, and 30,000 people show up, you're going to have a problem," U.S. District Judge Dolly M. Gee, who oversees the decades-old settlement agreement that governs custody conditions for the children, said at a recent hearing.

"The infrastructure is not set up for tens of thousands of people coming in at one time, and somehow the paradigm has to shift to figure out how to deal with these types of numbers," Gee said.

U.S. border authorities reported more than 18,000 encounters with unaccompanied immigrant children in July, up

24% from a month earlier. The rise comes in the busiest month yet for the Biden administration on the border with a total of nearly 200,000 encounters, even though crossings are typically expected to slow during the summer.

According to a government report in early August, the Department of Health and Human Services had nearly 15,000 children in its care, but only 11,000 licensed shelter beds for the immigrant children. Using large-scale facilities can fill this gap, though advocates said the government would do better by expanding licensed shelters where children are given case workers, recreation and six hours of education on each weekday.

## Dozens of homes, cabins burned in Minn. wildfire

Associated Press

ISABELLA — Dozens of homes, cabins and outbuildings have been destroyed or damaged in northeastern Minnesota as the state's largest wildfire continues burning uncontained, according to Superior National Forest officials.

Authorities say 12 homes or cabins and 57 outbuildings have been lost in the Greenwood Lake fire that has consumed 34 square miles of forest land. An additional three homes or cabins were damaged in the fire, Minnesota Public Radio News reported Wednesday.

Forest officials decided to keep the popular Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness closed another week, until Sept. 3, dealing a blow to tourists who spent months planning their trips there and to the outfitters and other businesses serving the 1 million-acre wilderness.

Several fires caused by

lightning have burned in the wilderness during this summer's drought conditions, while the much bigger Greenwood Lake fire just to the south has forced the evacuation of about 280 homes and cabins since it was spotted Aug. 15 about 15 miles southwest of the town of Isabella.

Forest officials were also watching fires burning just across the Canadian border, in Ontario's Quetico Provincial Park, which led them to close some parts of the Boundary Waters north of Ely earlier this summer.

But when the John Ek fire took off late last week, forest officials decided to close the entire wilderness area as a precaution. They said that fire and the Greenwood Lake fire had stretched their resources too thin to ensure the safety of paddlers and campers.

More than 400 crew members are fighting the forest fires.

## Calif. wildfire dangers may be spreading to the south

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A wildfire that burned several homes near Los Angeles may signal that the region is facing the same dangers that have scorched Northern California this summer.

The fire in San Bernardino County erupted Wednesday afternoon, quickly burned several hundred acres and damaged or destroyed at least a dozen homes and outbuildings in the foothills northeast of Los Angeles, fire officials said. Crews used shovels and bulldozers and mounted an air attack to keep the South Fire from the tiny communities of Lytle Creek and Scotland.

About 600 homes and other buildings were threatened by the blaze along with power transmission lines, and 1,000 residents were under evacuation orders.

By nightfall, firefighters appeared to have gained the upper hand and few flames were seen. But the blaze was worrying because Southern California's

high fire season typically comes later in the year when strong, dry Santa Ana winds blast out of the interior and flow toward the coast.

After a few cooler days, California's southern region was expected to experience a return of hot weather into the weekend that could boost wildfire risks. In addition to dangerously dry conditions, the region faces firefighting staffing that is increasingly stretched thin, said Lyn Sieliet, spokeswoman for the San Bernardino National Forest.

"Some of our firefighters that we normally have on our forests are working on fires in Northern California, or Idaho and Washington," she told KTLA-TV. "We don't have the full staff that we normally do."

The largest fires in the state and in the nation were in Northern California, where they have burned down small mountain towns and destroyed huge swaths of tinder-dry forest.



# Israeli PM: Biden should drop Iran nuke pact push

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett were to hold their first face-to-face meeting Thursday, and Israel's new leader said he planned to press Biden to give up his pursuit of reviving the Iran nuclear deal.

Before arriving in Washington, Bennett made clear the top priority of the visit to the White House was to persuade Biden not to return to the nuclear accord, arguing Iran has already advanced in its uranium enrichment and that sanctions relief would give Iran more resources to back Israel's enemies in the region.

The meeting, scheduled to start late Thursday morning, was delayed as Biden met with national security aides following explosions near the Kabul airport, where the United States and its allies are in the waning days of a major airlift that has drawn thousands of people seeking to flee Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover.

The Israeli leader met separately Wednesday with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Aus-

tin to discuss Iran and other issues. The visit is his first to the U.S. as prime minister. Bennett told his Cabinet before the trip that he would tell the American president "that now is the time to halt the Iranians, to stop this thing" and not to reenter "a nuclear deal that has already expired and is not relevant, even to those who thought it was once relevant."

Biden has made clear his desire to find a path to salvage the 2015 landmark pact cultivated by Barack Obama's administration but scuttled in 2018 by Donald Trump's. But U.S. indirect talks with Iran have stalled and Washington continues to maintain crippling sanctions on the country as regional hostilities simmer.

Trump's decision to withdraw from Iran's nuclear deal led Tehran to abandon over time every limitation the accord imposed on its nuclear enrichment. The country now enriches a small amount of uranium up to 63%, a short step from weapons-grade levels, compared with 3.67% under the deal. It also spins far more advanced centrifuges and more of them than were allowed.

# Adult film actor indicted on over 30 assault counts

*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — A grand jury has indicted adult film actor Ron Jeremy on more than 30 counts of sexual assault involving 21 women and girls across more than two decades, authorities said.

Jeremy, 68, whose legal name is Ronald Jeremy Hyatt, pleaded not guilty in Los Angeles Superior Court on Wednesday to all of the allegations, which include 12 counts of rape.

The indictment, which was returned Aug. 19 and unsealed Wednesday, covers allegations dating from 1996 to 2019, with victims aged 15 to 51. The counts appear to be identical to charges filed against Jeremy last year, which he also denied.

In a tactical move also employed in their case against Harvey Weinstein, LA County prosecutors used secret grand jury proceedings to get an indictment that replaces the original charges, allowing them to skip a public preliminary hearing on the evidence and proceed to trial.

Defense attorney Stuart Goldfarb said in an email that Jeremy's "position is the same as when the criminal complaint was filed. He is innocent of all the charges."

Jeremy has been held in jail on \$6.6 million bail since his arrest in June 2020.

The indictment includes allegations that Jeremy raped a 19-year-old woman during a photo shoot in 1996, raped a 26-year-old woman at a nightclub in 2003 and raped a 17-year-old girl at a home in 2008.

He is also charged with sexually assaulting a 15-year-old girl in 2004.

No trial date has been set.

Jeremy was told to return to court in October for a pretrial hearing.

Nicknamed "The Hedgehog," Jeremy has been among the best-known and most prolific performers in the porn industry for decades, appearing in hundreds of films since the 1970s. He has also made regular appearances in mainstream films and on reality TV shows.

Along with Weinstein, he is one of only a few men investigated and charged by a district attorney's task force formed to take on sexual misconduct in the entertainment industry as the #MeToo era gained momentum in late 2017.

Weinstein has pleaded not guilty to 10 counts of sexual assault and is also awaiting trial. A judge dismissed an 11th count.

# Court upholds death sentence for SC church shooter Dylann Roof

*Associated Press*

RICHMOND, Va. — A federal appeals court Wednesday upheld Dylann Roof's conviction and death sentence for the 2015 racist slayings of nine members of a Black South Carolina congregation, saying the legal record cannot even capture the "full horror" of what he did.

A unanimous three-judge panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond rejected arguments that the young white man should have been ruled incompetent to stand trial in the shootings at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston.

In 2017, Roof became the first person in the United States sentenced to death for a federal hate crime. Authorities have said Roof opened fire during the closing prayer of a Bible study at the church, raining down dozens of bullets on those assembled.

In his appeal, Roof's attorneys argued that he was wrongly allowed to represent

himself during sentencing, a critical phase of his trial. Roof successfully prevented jurors from hearing evidence about his mental health, "under the delusion," his attorneys argued, that "he would be rescued from prison by white-nationalists — but only, bizarrely, if he kept his mental impairments out of the public record."

Roof's lawyers said his convictions and death sentence should be vacated or his case should be sent back to court for a "proper competency evaluation."

The 4th Circuit found that the trial judge did not commit an error when he found Roof was competent to stand trial.

"Our office is grateful for the decision of the court, a decision that ensures, as the Court stated, that 'the harshest penalty a just society can impose' is indeed imposed," Assistant U.S. Attorney Nathan Williams, one of the lead prosecutors on the case said in a statement.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Illegal street racing shuts down bridge**

**OR** PORTLAND — The Fremont Bridge in Portland was closed for at least an hour as more than 100 people arrived at southbound Interstate 405 to watch what appeared to be a planned car stunt.

Hundreds of cars and trucks were at a standstill around 10:30 p.m. Sunday while other cars raced along the shoulder of southbound I-405 to gather in the center of the bridge, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported.

A group of cars blocked traffic, performed stunts and lit fireworks.

Last week, Portland City Council passed an emergency ordinance to revise city code in order to make “street racing” or “sliding” misdemeanor offenses — labeling them, “Unlawful Street Takeover” and “Unlawful Staging of a Street Takeover Event.”

**2 charged with copper thefts that killed power**

**IA** ONAWA — Two people are jailed after they allegedly stole copper from electrical substations in northwest Iowa, causing power outages and thousands of dollars in damage, authorities said.

Monona County Sheriff Jeff Pratt said in a news release that Craig Keller, 40, of Onawa, and Whitney Reynek, 30, of Tekamah, Neb., were arrested Monday.

Workers with Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative discovered someone had removed copper from grounding rods in the substations, Pratt said.

Sheriff's deputies recovered items from the substations and other burglaries on Sunday at a rural Whiting, Iowa, home.

**Man survives grizzly attack in national park**

**AK** ANCHORAGE — A 55-year-old Indiana man is recuperating in stable condition Tuesday at a Fairbanks hospital after being mauled by a bear in Denali National Park and Preserve.

The man, who has not been identified, was hiking alone Monday evening in Thoroughfare Pass south of the park road when a grizzly with two 1- or 2-year-old cubs attacked him, the park said in a statement Tuesday. There was dense fog in the area, and the bear attacked from about 100 feet away.

The man was able to use his bear spray, but only after he was knocked to the ground. The man suffered puncture wounds to his calf, left ribs and left shoulder, the statement said.

The bear left quickly after the attack, the park said, and the man was able to walk 1.5 miles to the Eielson Visitor Center, which is 66 miles from the park entrance.

He was taken by a park bus to an ambulance at the park entrance, and medical professionals on board the bus administered first aid.

**Walmart worker pleads guilty in gift card thefts**

**WV** WHEELING — A Walmart worker in West Virginia admitted to a federal charge related to the theft of \$124,000 in gift cards over a five-month period.

Kenneth Werkau of Clarington, Ohio, pleaded guilty Tuesday in federal court in Wheeling to a wire fraud charge.

Prosecutors said Werkau, 63, stole and activated the gift cards from September 2019 through January 2020 while employed as an associate at a Walmart in Moundsville.

**Authorities warn against flying drones over lab**

**NM** LOS ALAMOS — Authorities at one of the nation's top nuclear weapons laboratories issued a warning Monday that airspace over Los Alamos National Laboratory is off limits.

The birthplace of the atomic bomb, Los Alamos lab reported that recent unauthorized drone flights have been detected in restricted airspace in the area.

Officials said that if you fly a drone over the lab, you likely will lose it.

“We can detect and track a UAS (unmanned aircraft system), and if it poses a threat, we have the ability to disrupt control of the system, seize or exercise control, confiscate or use reasonable force to disable, damage or destroy the UAS,” said Unica Viramontes, senior director of lab security.

**Man arrested for fake Border Patrol uniform**

**AZ** TUCSON — A man wearing a fake U.S. Border Patrol uniform and driving a bogus patrol vehicle was arrested in southern Arizona after attempting to smuggle migrants into the country, authorities said.

Homeland Security Investi-

gations and Border Patrol agents arrested the driver and 10 migrants near Tucson.

John R. Modlin, interim Chief Patrol Agent of the Border Patrol's Tucson Sector, said the bogus car was a cloned vehicle similar to ones used by the Border Patrol.

Modlin also said the driver was wearing a fake Border Patrol uniform when arrested.

**Student's homemade lightsaber wins medal**

**WI** MADISON — A Madison high schooler has won an award for building his own lightsaber.

Wisconsin Public Radio reported that Madison Country Day School senior Kaebren Walker's creation earned him a gold medal at the NAACP's Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics. The 43rd annual event involved about 500 students competing in categories including science, engineering and the humanities. The winners were announced during the NAACP convention in July.

Jedi Knights in the “Star Wars” movie saga use lightsabers, described by Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi as “an elegant weapon for a more civilized age.” Walker said that he got the idea to construct a lightsaber while watching “Return of the Jedi.”

It took him 18 months to build the lightsaber and used approaches detailed on YouTube. His creation ignites acetone and methanol, which evaporates in a 3-foot span that becomes the blade. He said it looks like a thin flamethrower.

— From wire reports

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# Optimism abounds for college football

Associated Press

The 2021 college football season holds the promise of a return to normal after a pandemic-wrecked fall led to cancellations, postponements and headache after headache.

The games are on. Fans are getting ready to head back into the stadiums.

At the same time, college sports is entering a new era, with less-restrictive transfer rules and players who are permitted to be paid endorsers for the first time.

And the pandemic is not over. While there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic that this season won't be the struggle 2020 was, there is still more than a little uncertainty about how this all plays out — off the field and on as No. 1 Alabama tries to win a second consecutive national title against a host of challengers.

"It's an interesting time," North Carolina coach Mack Brown said.

Is it ever.

The pandemic: The season is a go, unaltered at this point, with all the conferences on board — unlike last year at this time. Vaccination rates among college football teams appear to be significantly ahead of the general

adult population.

Last season, 118 Bowl Subdivision games were either canceled or postponed as teams battled COVID-19. There will be no rescheduling of games in 2021. Conferences have said teams will be forced to forfeit if they can't field a team because of COVID-19 issues.

Health and safety protocols are still not uniform across all of major college football, but the common ground is this: Unlike last year when everyone was being tested frequently for the virus, only unvaccinated players and team personnel will be subject to routine surveillance testing. Only unvaccinated individuals will be automatically quarantined if they come into contact with someone infected with the virus.

"That gives us a competitive advantage in my mind, as we should not miss any time as a football team due to COVID," new Arizona coach Jedd Fisch said before the school proudly tweeted that the team had reached 100% vaccination status.

Many coaches have been publicly encouraging vaccination.

"I think it's irresponsible to not to get the vaccine," said Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin,

whose team also is 100% vaccinated.

Not every coach is taking this approach. Washington State's Nick Rolovich initially said he did not plan to be vaccinated on a campus where it is mandatory for all students and employees before saying he would comply with a governor's mandate.

Where the pandemic could have a deeper impact is with fans. The number of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths has been on the rise. But schools have been touting a return to full-capacity stadiums and tailgating after a season of playing in mostly empty buildings.

"I'm really excited, man, just to get back in The Swamp finally with 90,000 screaming out there," Florida defensive end Zach Carter said.

It seems unlikely those plans will change unless local governments step in, which happened last week in Hawaii. The Rainbow Warriors' opening game against Portland State on Sept. 5 will be played without fans.

Oregon and Oregon State became the first Power Five schools to announce fans will need to show proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test to attend their games.

## Critical games dot early college football slate

Associated Press

Every weekend in college football, the schedule offers compelling matchups.

Early in the season, some pit Power Five conference blue bloods against each other. Late in the season, there are rivalry showdowns and interconference bragging rights games.

The early ones are the hardest to predict and they're also the best to lose on the theory that an early stumble can be overcome with success the rest of the way. A late loss? Not so much.

This season's return to normal scheduling a year after the pandemic threw everything into a state of flux also marks a return to those critical games. Here are some of them:

**No. 5 Georgia at No. 3 Clemson (Charlotte, N.C.), Sept. 4:** This is important for both, of course, but its spot at the start of the season is more a chance for

the winner to add the 'W' to its playoff resume than for the loser to get knocked off that list. It's also the marquee game on each team's schedule. The Bulldogs aren't scheduled to play Alabama, LSU or Texas A&M of the SEC West, and the Tigers' dominance in the ACC is clear: Clemson has won the last four ACC championship games by an average of 34 points.

**No. 11 Oregon at No. 4 Ohio State, Sept. 11:** The Buckeyes have won all nine previous meetings with the Ducks, but the last meeting came in the 2015 national championship game, a 42-20 victory. Oregon could do the frequently maligned Pac-12 a huge favor and seem to have the weapons to make it happen, especially on an offense stacked with talented, young receivers. But Ohio State is no stranger to big early games and while its pass defense was

sketchy last year, allowing 304 yards per game, it brought in a freshman pass rusher and two DBs considered among the best secondary gets of last season's recruiting class.

**No. 8 Cincinnati at No. 9 Notre Dame, Oct. 2:** In quarterback Desmond Ridder, the Bearcats have a guy who seems to get better with each game, so much so that NFL scouts have noticed. He ran for 12 TDs last season and completed two-thirds of his passes. Cincinnati is one of five teams the Fighting Irish will face that has had more time to prepare than Brian Kelly's group. Wisconsin transfer Jack Coan has replaced Ian Book at QB for Notre Dame, but will operate behind a young line.

**No. 1 Alabama at No. 6 Texas A&M, Oct. 9:** The Aggies haven't contended for a national championship since 1939 and hope coach Jimbo Fisher's

fourth season changes that. The defending national champion Crimson Tide will have new faces on offense, including freshman quarterback Bryce Young, and that can always be a dicey proposition on the road, especially in College Station.

**No. 14 Miami at No. 10 North Carolina, Oct. 16:** If the league's prognosticators are right, this could become the decisive game in the ACC's Coastal Division, which earns the winner a likely matchup with No. 3 Clemson in Charlotte in December.

The 'Canes also have plenty of motivation for this game, having been embarrassed 62-26 at home last season by the Tar Heels. Coach Mack Brown's third season in his return to Chapel Hill comes with huge expectations, much riding on the arm of Heisman contender QB Sam Howell.



# Army looks to build on 9-win season

*Associated Press*

Army won nine games last season and finished just outside the AP Top 25 despite having to cope with a schedule that constantly changed because of COVID-19.

Coach Jeff Monken hopes to build off that success despite the usual loss of senior stars. The class of 2021 won 35 games, the most for a class in West Point history.

"I'm just excited about the leadership that we've got, a good group of seniors," said Monken, whose 49 wins in seven seasons put him at the doorstep of second place all-time at the academy. "I am anxious to see them compete. It's going to be interesting."

Last season's schedule ended up including three Championship Subdivision teams the Black Knights defeated by a combined score of 118-35, though The Citadel played Army to a near standoff, losing just 14-9 at Michie Stadium. Shutouts of Middle Tennessee State (42-0) and archrival Navy (15-0) helped Army end the season with the top defense in the nation (275.3 yards per game) under first-

year coordinator Nate Woody.

Those gone from that defense include linebackers Jon Rhattigan and Amadeo West. Also departed are 6-foot-6, 300-pound offensive guard Peyton Reeder and fullback Sandon McCoy (10 TDs), key cogs on a team that finished fourth nationally in rushing with an average of 273 yards.

"I wish we could re-sign those guys that we lose every year to new contracts and keep them around," Monken joked. "But that's not college football."

Still, more than 20 returning players participated in 10 or more games on defense last season. The offense had six quarterbacks take snaps in games. Monken hinted that the quarterback position will have many faces, among them seniors Christian Anderson and Jabari Laws, junior Tyhier Tyler and sophomore Cade Ballard.

"There are enough guys that played," said Monken, who is two wins from tying Jim Young for second in academy history, behind Hall of Famer "Red" Blaik's seemingly un-

touchable 121 wins in 18 seasons.

The Black Knights chose four defensive players as team captains — senior DL Nolan Cockrill, senior DB Cedrick Cunningham, senior LB Arik Smith, and DB Marquel Broughton, just the third junior since 2015 to be so honored.

"We lean on other leaders on the team," Smith said. "It's by committee. There's no one guy. It's been going well."

Cockrill had a breakout junior year with 28 tackles, including seven for losses. He led the team with four QB hurries, and had two pass breakups and one forced fumble. Cunningham had 37 solo stops, and Smith tied for the team lead with Rhattigan in total tackles with 78. Broughton led the team with 40 solo tackles.

"We want to make sure that we don't outsmart ourselves," Woody said. "Being able to be somewhat multiple in coverages and make quarterbacks have to think where they want to go with the ball is incredibly important to us."

## Jackson, fully recovered, ready to shoulder load for Falcons' defense

*Associated Press*

Air Force defensive lineman Jordan Jackson delivered in a big way last season. Food, that is.

While rehabbing from shoulder surgery, Jackson returned home and took a side job with the food delivery platform Uber Eats. He was one of 35 or so Falcons players granted an administrative turn-back, which allows cadets to take up to two semesters away from the academy.

With Jackson among those returning to the mix, the Falcons may resemble the 2019 squad — 11-2 mark, bowl win, top-25 ranking — more than the version that finished 3-3 in a 2020 season shortened by the coronavirus. The team also had two games canceled last year and fell to Army in the season finale to lose out on hoisting the coveted Commander-In-Chief's Trophy.

"It was tough," Jackson said in an interview produced by Air Force's "Falcon Vision" about watching from home as his teammates took the field in 2020. "Growing up always playing football, not somebody who usually is able to sit out."

In the Mountain West preseason poll,

the Falcons were predicted to finish third in their division. That may be due to the fact they're a relative unknown given all the players returning.

Air Force has experience at QB in Haaziq Daniels, who started every game in 2020 and finished second on the team in rushing with 297 yards. He also threw for 433 yards and three TDs.

Defensive back Milton Bugg III and linebacker Lakota Wills return from taking a turn-back to lead what could be a stalwart defense. In 2019, Bugg finished with three interceptions. His brother, Mason, also is on the team as a free safety.

The key will be quickly restoring the chemistry. This was a defense that allowed a program-low 100.5 yards rushing per game in 2019.

For Jackson, it was a difficult assignment being away from teammates. He was coming off a 2019 season where he recorded 38 total tackles, 4½ tackles for loss and 3½ sacks. The time off allowed him to heal his shoulder — and earn a little extra money by delivering food.

"It's definitely different going to a full-time job," he said.

## Navy looking to reignite offense

*Associated Press*

Anyone who watches Navy football knows if the Midshipmen aren't gaining significant yardage on the ground, something's wrong.

Something was definitely wrong in 2020.

"We didn't practice last year. I don't know how (much) clearer to say it. We missed 15 practices," coach Ken Niumatalolo said. "When we couldn't do things, it was totally different from other schools. We were in our rooms, and you could come out for a little bit ... but you couldn't be with anybody else. You had to be with your roommates."

Whatever the reason, Navy's offense sputtered last season, averaging just 177.6 yards rushing, the team's lowest output since 1994. The Midshipmen finished 52nd in the country in that category — after finishing in the top six in each of Niumatalolo's first dozen seasons as coach. It was no surprise, then, that Navy floundered to a 3-7, just its third losing season in 18 years.

"We were in a pandemic last year. I mean, obviously we're still in it," he said. "And then the way we practiced was totally on me ... I was going to make sure that we erred on the side of caution. So I wouldn't call what we did practice, when we finally came back."

# Winning scent: O's snap 19-game skid

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — After 19 consecutive losses, the Baltimore Orioles were ready to try just about anything.

Newcomer Chris Ellis found that out while preparing to make his first big league start.

"I was sitting at my locker, kind of just going over the lineup for the day, and I saw Trey Mancini walking though there with a bunch of sage. Everybody was getting a whiff of it," Ellis said. "Maybe we'll have to start doing that before every game."

The Orioles finally stopped their slide

Wednesday night, rallying to beat Los Angeles 10-6 after a shaky start by Shohei Ohtani left the Angels' bullpen with too much to do.

Los Angeles was up 6-2 in the fourth inning and 6-4 when Ohtani left the game after the top of the sixth. Baltimore scored a run in the seventh and five in the eighth. Ramón Urías and Kelvin Gutierrez drew bases-loaded walks to put the Orioles up 7-6, and pinch-hitter Austin Hays added a two-run double.

Baltimore was two losses shy of the American League record for the longest skid —

which it set in 1988 when the team started 0-21.

"The clubhouse is loud right now. There's a lot of people that are very excited, relieved," manager Brandon Hyde said. "It's good to hear our guys feel good about the game they just played."

When Tyler Wells retired the final batter of the game on a flyout to right, he hugged catcher Pedro Severino and Baltimore celebrated casually on the field. The fans — many of whom probably came to see Ohtani — roared their approval.

## Pollock's homer in 16th lifts Dodgers past Padres

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — After 16 innings that took 5 hours, 49 minutes to play, featuring 489 pitches by 19 pitchers who stranded a combined 35 baserunners, the streaking Los Angeles Dodgers finally got to celebrate.

AJ Pollock led off the 16th with a two-run homer and the Dodgers outlasted the struggling San Diego Padres 5-3 early Thursday in by far the longest major league game since pandemic rules were implemented last year.

No game had gone longer than 13 innings since MLB began putting an automatic runner on second base to start extra innings during the shortened 2020 season.

"You can listen to the excitement, elation after the game," Los Angeles manager Dave Roberts said. "A lot of high-fives, maybe a couple of beer showers, guys really just on adrenaline. Just finding a way to win a ballgame. It should count as two, but unfortunately it doesn't."

Pollock's 16th homer came off rookie reliever Daniel Camarena (0-1), the ninth San Diego pitcher. The Dodgers used 10, including winner Corey Knebel (4-0) and Shane Greene, who worked the 16th for his first save.

Greene was the 47th player of

52 on the two active rosters to appear in the game.

**Giants 3, Mets 2:** Jake McGee induced a game-ending popup from Pete Alonso with the bases loaded, and visiting San Francisco turned five double plays to beat freefalling New York.

Brandon Crawford hit a go-ahead, two-run double in the seventh inning after Mets manager Luis Rojas gave starter Taijuan Walker an aggressive hook.

**Cardinals 3, Tigers 2:** Paul Goldschmidt homered twice and scored the game-ending run on Lars Nootbaar's single in the 10th inning as host St. Louis beat Detroit.

Nootbaar lined a two-out single to right field off Michael Fulmer (5-6) in the 10th to score Goldschmidt, who had been intentionally walked.

**Rays 7, Phillies 4:** Francisco Mejia hit a tiebreaking three-run homer in the ninth inning, Brandon Lowe connected for his 30th of the season and AL East-leading Tampa Bay beat slumping host Philadelphia.

The Rays have won eight of nine.

Bryce Harper and Rhys Hoskins homered for the Phillies, who have lost six of eight.

**Brewers 4, Reds 1:** Brandon Woodruff struck out 10 in six shutout innings and host Mil-

waukee extended its NL Central lead over Cincinnati to 9½ games.

Avisaíl García hit an RBI double and made two big defensive plays in right field for the Brewers, who have won 12 of 15.

Woodruff (8-7) permitted only four hits and retired 13 straight batters during one stretch.

**Astros 6, Royals 5 (10):** Alex Bregman had two hits and an RBI in his first action in more than two months, and he scored the winning run in the 10th inning on a groundout by Jake Meyers to lift host Houston over Kansas City.

**Cubs 5, Rockies 2; Rockies 13, Cubs 10 (10):** Ryan McMahon lofted a two-run homer in the 10th inning, Brendan Rodgers followed with a two-run double that gave him five RBIs for the game and visiting Colorado split a doubleheader with Chicago.

The Cubs won the opener 5-2 in a tidy 2 hours, 9 minutes, thanks to Patrick Wisdom's tie-breaking three-run homer in the fifth inning.

The nightcap lasted exactly twice as long — 4:18. McMahon hit a high drive to left field off Jake Jewell (0-2) for his 19th homer. Rodgers, who hit a two-run homer in the first inning, ripped his double down the left-field line.

**Blue Jays 3, White Sox 1:** Alejandro Kirk broke a tie with an RBI single in the eighth inning and host Toronto beat Chicago.

Blue Jays starter Robbie Ray matched his career high by striking out 14 in seven innings.

The AL Central-leading White Sox lost for the fourth time in five games.

**Twins 9, Red Sox 6 (10):** Josh Donaldson hit a two-run homer to lead off the 10th after Boston rallied from a four-run deficit to send the game into extra innings, and Jake Cave added a three-run shot for visiting Minnesota.

Donaldson and Jorge Polanco homered for the second straight game, and Miguel Sanó hit a 495-foot homer that is the longest in the majors this year and one of the longest in the history of Fenway Park.

**Indians 7, Rangers 2:** Framil Reyes drove a 451-foot home run into the left field bleachers, one of four homers by host Cleveland against Texas.

**Marlins 4, Nationals 3 (10):** Jorge Alfaro singled with the bases loaded in the 10th inning and host Miami beat Washington to snap an eight-game skid.

**Diamondbacks 5, Pirates 2:** Carson Kelly and Pavin Smith homered and visiting Arizona rallied against Pittsburgh's bullpen.