

2 ISIS-K terrorists killed by US drone

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A U.S. drone killed two Islamic State terrorists and injured a third in an airstrike less than two days after an attack at the Kabul airport killed 13 American troops, Army Maj. Gen. Hank Taylor, the Joint Staff's deputy director for regional operations, said Saturday.

The drone strike in the Nangarhar province hit “high-profile ISIS targets” that worked as “planners and facilitators” for the terrorist group’s Afghanistan branch known as ISIS-Khorasan, or ISIS-K, Taylor said. A sole suicide bomber and an unknown number of gunmen on Thursday attacked a gate at the Hamid Karzai International Airport killing the U.S. troops and wounding 20 other service members.

The ISIS-K attack killed 11 Marines, a sailor, a soldier and a large number of Afghan civilians when a terrorist wearing an explosive vest detonated it near the airport’s Abbey Gate “followed by direct [gun]fire from an enemy position,” Taylor had said. The gate is one of three entrances to the airport where large crowds of people had been gathered to vie for evacuation flights.

The airstrike was conducted in response to the airport attack, chief Pentagon spokesman John Kirby confirmed Saturday.

“We have the ability to conduct over-the-horizon counterterrorism capabilities — we’ve talked about that — this certainly fits in that mold,” he said. “But it’s not a coincidence that it happened just a couple of days after we lost 13 brave service members.”

In the hours after the bombing Thursday, President Joe Biden pledged vengeance against the perpetrators of the attack.

“To those who carried out this attack, as well as anyone who wishes America harm, know this: We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay,” he said. “I will defend our interests and our people with every measure at my command.”

The troops killed and injured were conducting security checks on Afghan evacuees attempting to enter the airport when the attack happened. U.S. and coalition forces have been evacuating tens of thousands of Americans and Afghans since the Taliban took control of the country two weeks ago.

Those evacuations continued despite the deadly attack, with the U.S. evacuating about

4,000 people on 27 C-17 and five C-130 transport aircraft on Friday, Taylor said. Additionally, 34 coalition aircraft carried 2,800 evacuees out of Kabul.

In total, U.S. and coalition forces as of Saturday had evacuated more than 117,000 people, about 5,400 of whom are Americans, Taylor said.

Though the U.S. military’s withdrawal from the airport has begun, Taylor said the evacuations will carry on until Tuesday.

“We continue to evacuate American citizens and vulnerable Afghans out of Kabul,” he said. “In fact, there are approximately 1,400 individuals at the Kabul airport who have been screened and [readied] for flights (Saturday).”

Taylor also said the U.S. could conduct more airstrikes as the threat in the region remains in the final days of the withdrawal and evacuation missions there. U.S. forces began moving out more equipment Saturday, Kirby said.

“Without specifying any future plans, I will say that we will continue to have the ability to defend ourselves and to leverage over-the-horizon capability to conduct counterterrorism operations as needed,” Taylor said.

Demand for Afghanistan ‘accountability’ leads to firing

By CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

The Marine officer who filmed a viral video calling out senior military and civilian leaders for failures in Afghanistan was relieved of command Friday “based on a lack of trust and confidence,” he said.

“My chain of command is doing exactly what I would do ... if I were in their shoes,” Lt. Col. Stu Scheller wrote in identical Facebook and LinkedIn posts announcing his dismissal from command of the Advanced Infantry Training Battalion at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Marine leaders can address their disagreements with the chain of command through proper channels, not social media, said Maj. Jim Stenger, a Marine Corps spokesman, in an emailed statement confirming that Scheller had been relieved by

Col. David Emmel, commanding officer of the School of Infantry-East.

“This is obviously an emotional time for a lot of Marines, and we encourage anyone struggling right now to seek counseling or talk to a fellow Marine,” Stenger said.

Scheller posted the video critique on social media Thursday, hours after a blast in Kabul killed 13 U.S. troops. He appears in uniform and responds directly to Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger’s letter to troops and veterans asking whether the nearly 20-year-long war in Afghanistan was worth it.

“The reason people are so upset on social media right now is not because the Marine on the battlefield let someone down,” Scheller says in the video. “People are upset because their senior leaders let them down. And none of them are raising their hands and

accepting accountability or saying, ‘We messed this up.’”

The video garnered more than 300,000 views and 22,000 shares on Facebook and LinkedIn, spurring both praise and criticism in the more than 4,000 comments within its first 24 hours.

It’s the latest in a spate of calls from veterans and others demanding that senior officials answer for mistakes over the course of the war, especially in its final months. Some have blamed the precipitous U.S. withdrawal for undermining the Afghan government and allowing the Taliban to seize the country.

Critics have also likened the Afghanistan failure to Islamic State’s sweep through Syria and Iraq in 2014, when President Joe Biden was vice president and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin led U.S. Central Command.

Airport mostly closed off as airlift effort dwindles

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Taliban forces sealed off Kabul's airport Saturday to most Afghans hoping for evacuation and most NATO nations flew out their troops after two decades in Afghanistan, winding down a frantic airlift that Western leaders acknowledged was still leaving many of their citizens and local allies behind.

The United States, which says round-the-clock multinational flights have evacuated 117,000 people since the Taliban claimed Kabul on Aug. 15, was keeping up airlifts ahead of President Joe Biden's Tuesday deadline for withdrawal.

Britain also was carrying out its final evacuation flights Saturday, though Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised to "shift heaven and earth" to get more of those at risk from the Taliban to Britain by other means.

Britain's ambassador to Afghanistan, Laurie Bristow, said in a video from Kabul airport and posted on Twitter that it was "time to close this phase of the operation now."

"But we haven't forgotten the people who still need to leave," he said. "We'll continue to do everything we can to help them. Nor have we forgotten the brave, decent people of Afghanistan. They deserve to live in

peace and security."

As the flow of planes leaving Kabul slowed, others arrived in locales around the world carrying Afghans who managed to secure places on the last evacuation flights, including in the Washington area, Philadelphia, Madrid, Birmingham, England, among others.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed Saturday that the group's forces were holding some positions within the airport and were ready to peacefully take control of it as American forces flew out. But Pentagon spokesman John Kirby denied the claim.

The Taliban did deploy extra forces outside of the airport to prevent large crowds from gathering in the wake of Thursday's bombing. New layers of checkpoints sprang up on roads leading to the airport, some manned by uniformed Taliban fighters with Humvees and night-vision goggles captured from Afghan security forces.

According to a State Department spokesperson, 5,400 Americans and likely more have been safely evacuated from Afghanistan since Aug. 14, including nearly 300 Americans in the last day. Another 350 were still seeking to leave the country, and those were the only ones the department could confirm were still in Afghanistan.

7 US bases to house up to 50,000 Afghans

The Washington Post

The U.S. military is destroying equipment at the Kabul airport and more than doubling its temporary housing capacity on bases in the United States to extract as many people from Afghanistan as possible before Tuesday's withdrawal deadline.

The military will be able to accommodate up to 50,000 Afghans at seven bases and facilities in the United States, said Pentagon spokesman John Kirby, who announced that Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico, and Fort Pickett and Marine Corps Base Quantico in Virginia had been added to the four installations already part of the operation.

The airlift, which as of Friday morning had carried upward of 110,000 people out of Kabul, is entering its last four days amid intense urgency, with Hamid Karzai International Airport reeling from a terrorist attack Thursday that killed 13 U.S. service members and at least 170 others — the vast majority of them Afghans.

As of midday Friday, about 14,000 Afghan evacuees had arrived in the United States via Dulles International Airport, according to Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam, a Democrat. According to Air Force Gen. Glen VanHerck, the commander of U.S. Northern Command, 6,578 Afghans had arrived at the four military installations — Fort Lee in Virginia, Fort Bliss in Texas, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey and Fort McCoy in Wisconsin.

At least 25 countries have signed on to temporarily host or serve as way stations for the tens of thousands of other Afghans who have departed Kabul.

Once evacuees arrive in the United States, "we're prepared to house them and feed them as long as it takes to get them through the process," VanHerck told reporters Friday, noting that many of the arriving Afghans "have family already here in the United States, or they'll be relocated to places with Afghan populations."

Kirby, the Pentagon spokesman, told reporters Friday that about 5,000 U.S. service members remain in Kabul but that there would be no more updates about their drawdown until all have left.

USS Arlington supplies aid to Haiti

Daily Press (Virginia)

The USS Arlington was in such a hurry to get to earthquake and storm-ravaged Haiti that it didn't even wait in Norfolk to board all its Marine Corps contingent — many of them came out in landing craft and boarded the ship while it was off the North Carolina shore.

The Norfolk-based ship is the base from which U.S. military helicopters have run hundreds of flights, carrying medicine, food and other desperately needed supplies.

Stationed about three miles offshore, Arlington's sailors and Marines are keeping some 16 helicopters stocked and refueled

as they shuttle between the ship, the Port au Prince airport — where aid supplies are coming in — and the towns and countryside at the western end of Haiti's long southern peninsula.

The 7.2 magnitude earthquake destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes and rendered most roads on the southern peninsula impassable on Aug. 14. The peninsula was hammered a few days later by tropical storm Grace.

In just the first three days of operation, they've rescued or helped more than 435 people, flew more than 360 missions and transported more than 160,000 pounds of supplies.

La. braces for menacing Hurricane Ida

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Weather forecasters warned residents along Louisiana's coast to rush preparations Saturday in anticipation of an intensifying Hurricane Ida, which was expected to bring winds as high as 140 mph when it slammed ashore Sunday.

Authorities called a combination of voluntary and mandatory evacuations for cities and communities across the region. In New Orleans, the mayor ordered a mandatory evacuation for areas outside the city's levee system and a voluntary evacuation for residents inside the levee system. But since the storm quickly escalated in intensity, Mayor LaToya Cantrell said it was not possible to order a mandatory evacuation

for the entire city, which would require using all lanes of some highways to leave the city.

"If you plan to evacuate, do so now," said a mid-morning advisory from the city.

Traffic was heavy on westbound routes out of town early Saturday and gas stations were busy.

The storm is expected to make landfall on the exact date Hurricane Katrina devastated a large swath of the Gulf Coast 16 years earlier. But Katrina was a Category 3 when it made landfall southwest of New Orleans.

"Today is it," Jamie Rhome, acting deputy director of the U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami, said Saturday. "If you're in coastal Louisiana and Mississippi, you

really, really have to get going because today is it in terms of protecting life and property."

Ida intensified rapidly Friday from a tropical storm to a hurricane with top winds of 80 mph as it crossed western Cuba.

Late Saturday morning, Ida was centered 435 miles southeast of Houma, a city on Louisiana's coast. It was traveling northwest at 16 mph, forecasters said. It's maximum sustained winds were 85 mph. The wind speed in the late morning forecast had not picked up from an earlier advisory from the National Hurricane Center, but forecasters still expected it to reach Category 4 strength before making landfall on the central Louisiana coast.

RFK assassin Sirhan given parole after 53 years

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — For 15 years, Robert F. Kennedy's assassin was denied parole by a California parole board that maintained Sirhan Sirhan did not show adequate remorse or understand the enormity of his crime that rocked the nation and the world in 1968.

But on Friday, the two-person panel said he appeared to be a different man, even from his last hearing in 2016, and granted the 77-year-old prisoner parole. Two of RFK's sons, going against several of their siblings' wishes, said they also supported releasing him and prosecutors declined to argue he should be kept behind bars. But the governor ultimately will decide if he

leaves prison.

The board found Sirhan no longer poses a threat to society, noting that he had enrolled in more than 20 programs including anger management classes, Tai Chi and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, even during the coronavirus pandemic.

"We think that you have grown," Parole Board Commissioner Robert Barton said.

Douglas Kennedy was a toddler when his father was gunned down in 1968. He told a two-person board panel that he was moved to tears by Sirhan's remorse and that Sirhan should be released if he's not a threat to others.

"I'm overwhelmed just by being able to view Mr. Sirhan face to face," he said. "I've

lived my life both in fear of him and his name in one way or another. And I am grateful today to see him as a human being worthy of compassion and love."

Six of Kennedy's nine surviving children, however, said they were shocked by the vote. They urged Gov. Gavin Newsom, who is facing a recall election in California, to reverse the parole board's decision and keep Sirhan behind bars.

But another sibling, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., has spoken in favor of his release in the past and wrote in favor of paroling Sirhan. He said in the letter that he met him in prison and was moved by Sirhan, "who wept, clinching my hands, and asked for forgiveness."

Biden announces 2.7% pay raises for federal workers

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Friday announced plans to give all federal civilian employees an average 2.7% pay raise, consistent with the increases he had proposed in his 2022 budget.

"I have determined that for 2022, the across-the-board base pay increase will be 2.2 percent and locality pay increases will average 0.5 percent, resulting in an overall average increase of 2.7 percent for civilian Federal employees," Biden wrote in a letter to congressional leaders Friday.

The adjustments would take effect "on the first day of the first applicable pay period be-

ginning on or after January 1, 2022," Biden wrote.

The raise would apply to some 2.1 million executive branch employees, although not to the more than 600,000 employees of the U.S. Postal Service, whose raises are set through bargaining. Cost-of-living increases for federal retirees also are determined separately, reflecting the same inflation measure used for Social Security benefits.

The president's announced pay increases are not set in stone. If Congress enacts different rates of pay increases for 2022, those numbers would take precedent over Biden's. If Congress doesn't specify any rates,

Biden's numbers take effect automatically. The Democratic-controlled Congress is unlikely to push for rates lower than Biden's.

Several federal employee unions had been calling for a 3.2% increase. One of those, the National Treasury Employees Union, on Friday described Biden's proposed raises as "a vast improvement over the previous administration's attempts to freeze federal pay."

"However, federal employee pay increases have lagged for years and there is still a very real gap between federal pay and comparable positions in the private sector," NTEU President Tony Reardon said in a statement.

Voting system breaches endanger elections

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Republican efforts questioning the outcome of the 2020 presidential race have led to voting system breaches that election security experts say pose a heightened risk to future elections.

Copies of the Dominion Voting Systems software used to manage elections — from designing ballots to configuring voting machines and tallying results — were distributed at an event this month in South Dakota organized by MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell, an ally of former President Donald Trump who has made unsubstantiated claims about last year's election.

"It's a game changer in that the environment we have talked about existing now is a reality," said Matt Masterson, a former top

election security official in the Trump administration. "We told election officials, essentially, that you should assume this information is already out there. Now we know it is, and we don't know what they are going to do with it."

The software copies came from voting equipment in Mesa County, Colo., and Antrim County, Mich., where Trump allies had sued, unsuccessfully challenging the results from last fall.

The Dominion software is used in some 30 states, including counties in California, Georgia and Michigan.

Election security pioneer Harri Hursti was at the South Dakota event and said he and other researchers in attendance were provided three separate copies of election

management systems that run on the Dominion software. The data indicated they were from Antrim and Mesa counties. While it's not clear how the copies came to be released at the event, they were posted online and made available for public download.

The release gives hackers a "practice environment" to probe for vulnerabilities they could exploit and a road map to avoid defenses, Hursti said. All the hackers would need is physical access to the systems because they are not supposed to be connected to the Internet.

"The door is now wide open," Hursti said. "The only question is, how do you sneak in the door?"

A Dominion representative declined comment, citing an investigation.

Capone's personal effects to be auctioned

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Al Capone is infamous for having been a ruthless mob boss, but one of his granddaughters says his softer side will shine through when the family auctions the Prohibition-era gangster's personal items — including diamond-encrusted jewelry with his initials, family photographs and his favorite handgun.

Capone's three granddaughters will also auction a letter he wrote to their father and his only child, Albert "Sonny" Capone, from Alcatraz, where the mobster served an 11-year sentence following his 1934 tax evasion conviction. In the letter written in pencil, Al Capone refers to Sonny as "son of my heart."

He was called Public Enemy No. 1 after the 1929 "Valentine's Day Massacre" of seven

members of a rival bootlegger gang in Chicago by his associates.

But his granddaughter Diane Capone describes him differently.

"He was very loving, very devoted to family, very generous, and the letter that we have is such a poignant, beautiful letter from a father to his son. These are things that the public doesn't know about," said Diane Capone, 77.

Diane Capone and her two surviving sisters will sell 174 items at the Oct. 8 auction titled "A Century of Notoriety: The Estate of Al Capone" hosted by Witherell's Auction House in Sacramento.

Among the pieces are gold-rimmed porcelain fine china, ornate furniture, artwork and Dresden figurines that once decorated the Palm Island, Fla., villa where the Chicago

mobster lived after his release from prison and until his death in 1947.

Also up for sale is the Colt .45-caliber pistol Capone always carried with him and used several times to protect himself, Diane Capone said.

Diane Capone said she didn't know if the gun was used to commit any crimes and said her grandfather, who she called Papa, was never charged with killing anyone.

"He was accused of doing that, but he was never found guilty of shooting anyone," she said.

The pistol with elaborate etchings and a wooden grip will be the centerpiece of the auction and is valued at up to \$150,000, said Brian Witherell, founder of Witherell's Auction House.

California eyes paying drug addicts to stay sober

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Frustrated by out-of-control increases in drug overdose deaths, California's leaders are trying something radical: They want the state to be the first to pay people to stay sober.

The federal government has been doing it for years with military veterans and research shows it is one of the most effective ways to get people to stop using drugs like cocaine and methamphetamine, stimulants for which there are no pharmaceutical treatments available.

It works like this: People earn small in-

centives or payments for every negative drug test over a period of time. Most people who complete the treatment without any positive tests can earn a few hundred dollars. They usually get the money on a gift card.

It's called "contingency management" and Gov. Gavin Newsom has asked the federal government for permission to use tax dollars to pay for it through Medicaid, the joint state and federal health insurance program for the poor and disabled that covers nearly 14 million people in California.

Meanwhile, a similar proposal is moving

through California's Democratic-controlled Legislature. It's already passed the Senate with no opposition and is pending in the Assembly, where it has a Republican co-author.

"I think there is a lot in this strategy for everyone to like," said state Sen. Scott Wiener, a Democrat from San Francisco and author of the bill. "Most important of all, it works."

How much it would cost depends on how many people participate. A program covering 1,000 people could cost as much as \$286,000, a pittance in California's total operating budget of more than \$262 billion.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Pasty festival returns to town after pandemic

M CALUMET — A festival dedicated to the most famous food of Michigan's Upper Peninsula returned to a small town after a year off due to the coronavirus.

Sean Nichols won the pasty-eating contest by eating nearly three in Calumet. People in pasty costumes marched during a parade. And a local curling club rolled rutabagas, The Daily Mining Gazette reported.

Calumet was a copper mining center and pasties were commonly eaten by miners. They typically are made with meat and potatoes stuffed into a crust.

Drinking, vaping woman without mask fined

FL KEY WEST — Federal aviation officials fined a woman \$17,000 for drinking alcohol not served by the airline, vaping and refusing to wear a mask on a flight to Charlotte, N. C.

The Federal Aviation Administration said the woman on a Republic Airways flight from Key West, Fla., on Feb. 28 was drinking alcohol that wasn't served by the airline, interfering with crew members, trying to use a vape pen and was not complying with the federal face mask mandate. The FAA said the aircraft returned to the gate at the Key West airport and she was removed from the plane.

Dump truck plows into apartments, kills 1

CA ANAHEIM — A dump truck loaded

with thousands of pounds of debris veered off a Southern California freeway off-ramp and slammed into two apartment buildings, killing a resident, authorities said.

The truck came down the off-ramp to State Route 57 in Anaheim and struck a car waiting at a red light, hit two other vehicles as it careened across a road, crossed a field and smashed through the wall of a parking area, California Highway Patrol Officer Florentino Olivera said.

The truck then smashed through the back wall of an apartment, where a man in his bed was pushed into a second apartment building, the CHP said.

Rory Antoine, 61, died at the scene. The truck driver was taken to a hospital with minor to moderate injuries, and a person in one of the cars was taken to a hospital for examination, the patrol said.

Man who impersonated officer gets probation

KS WICHITA — A Wichita man who impersonated a police officer several times last year has been sentenced to a year of probation.

Daniel J. Corrieri, a bail enforcement agent, was initially charged with 10 misdemeanors but pleaded guilty earlier this summer to driving under the influence and false impersonation, The Wichita Eagle reported.

A court affidavit said that on April 9, 2020, Corrieri pulled his car behind two teenagers working on a car, activated flashing lights on his vehicle and told them he was a Wichita officer.

He was holding a gun and wearing body armor at the time.

He was arrested after a person became suspicious and followed him. Corrieri was jailed after he failed a field sobriety test, court records said.

When he was sentenced Aug. 12, a judge barred Corrieri from working in bonding or fugitive apprehension.

Officers find 11 pounds of fentanyl during stop

NE LEXINGTON — Law enforcement officers recovered 11 pounds of fentanyl during a traffic stop on Interstate 80, the Nebraska State Patrol said.

A trooper stopped a car on the interstate about 2 miles west of Lexington because it had defective lighting, the patrol said.

The trooper and a Dawson County Sheriff's deputy saw marijuana in the car and found the fentanyl during a search, according to the patrol.

The driver, Alexis Murillo Godoy, 27, of Long Beach, Calif., was arrested and held in Dawson County on possible counts of possession of a controlled substance, possession with intent to deliver and other charges.

The patrol said the Drug Enforcement Administration estimates that 11 pounds of fentanyl contains about 2.5 million lethal doses.

Bean field on family farm collapses 25 feet

MN CLIMAX — Some consider it a geological wonder. A crack in the soil of a bean field in northwestern Minnesota has caused the ground to collapse 25 feet, cre-

ating a quarter-mile ravine.

Wayne and Erllene Erickson are the fourth generation on the family farm near Climax in Polk County, and say they've never seen anything like it, WDAY-TV reported.

The fallen land is pushing under the river bank, sending more dirt into the Red River.

Geologists with the University of North Dakota say the dry weather, a drop in water levels on the Red River and recent rains can form a perfect storm for something like this to occur.

Crevasses are still forming as the land continues shifting. Soil experts were expected to visit the field to study the natural phenomenon.

Federal officials act to protect dolphins

HI KAILUA-KONA — Federal officials have taken a step toward protecting Hawaii's spinner dolphins.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration published a final environmental impact statement that proposes limiting how close people can get to spinner dolphins, West Hawaii Today reported.

The proposal sets a 50 yard barrier around the dolphins for swimmers, vessels and aircraft. It would also prohibit putting people or vehicles in the path of the mammals. If approved, the measure would limit interactions within 2 nautical miles of Hawaii's shores.

Violators could face fines up to \$11,000, a year in prison and forfeiture of the vessels involved. There are exceptions, including when dolphins approach swimmers or vessels.

—From wire reports

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Djokovic, Osaka center stage at US Open

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Novak Djokovic is well aware that his two-track pursuit of men's tennis history at the U.S. Open — the first calendar-year Grand Slam in more than a half-century and a record 21st major title — means all eyes will be on him when he is on the court.

"I'm hugely inspired and motivated by that, no doubt. But at the same time, I know how to balance things out mentally, with lots of expectations, obviously, around. My participation here — without Rafa (Nadal) and Roger (Federer) participating," Djokovic said Friday, mentioning the two sidelined rivals with whom he shares the current men's standard of 20 majors.

"I feel it," he continued. "I know there's a lot of people who are going to be watching my matches and expecting me to do well and fight for a Slam."

Naomi Osaka knows, too, that her return to Grand Slam action for the first time since pulling out of the French Open for a mental health break means she will be the center of attention when she has a racket in her hand as the defending women's champion at Flushing Meadows — and when she has microphones in front of her.

"I mean, it will definitely feel a bit different. I don't really know how to describe it, but I kind of had to get over the feeling of people's gazes feeling a bit different to me.

At the same time, I started to tell myself that it is what it is. Like, I did what I did, so I can't really change people's perception on me," Osaka said. "It might make me feel a little bit nervous. But first rounds always make me feel a little nervous. Maybe I can just attribute it to that. I guess I'll find out when I'm in that situation."

The year's last Grand Slam tournament begins Monday — with full crowds allowed a year after all fans were banned because of the coronavirus outbreak — and, even if this weren't the first one since 1997 that'll be missing Federer, Nadal and both Williams sisters, there is little doubt where the focus would be.

Djokovic, a 34-year-old from Serbia who is seeded No. 1, and Osaka, a 23-year-old from Japan who is seeded No. 3.

"I really wish for me to maybe, one day, be at that level of consistency and be able to dominate Grand Slams at such a level," said No. 3 seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, who blew a two-set lead against Djokovic in the French Open final. "It is something that comes with time."

Djokovic began his accumulation of major trophies on the hard courts of the Australian Open in 2008; his title there this February was his ninth. He added his second trophy on the red clay of Roland Garros in June, followed by his sixth on the grass of Wimbledon in July. A fourth on the hard

courts of the U.S. Open in the Sept. 12 final would not only let him break a tie for career Slams with Federer and Nadal but also go 4-for-4 this year, something only two other men have managed to do.

Don Budge was the first in 1938, and Rod Laver followed by putting together true Grand Slams in 1962 and 1969. Here's what an achievement that is: In the 52 years since, no man even had won the first three major titles in a single season until Djokovic now.

"He's just amazing," said No. 2 seed Daniil Medvedev, who lost to Djokovic in the final at Melbourne Park. "I have no other word."

Osaka has started accumulating major titles, especially on hard courts — two at the Australian Open (including this year) and two at the U.S. Open (including last year).

Shortly before the French Open began in May, she vowed not to speak to media, saying the process raised doubts in her mind. Then, when she skipped the news conference after her first-round win in Paris, she was fined \$15,000 and threatened with suspension — so Osaka withdrew from the tournament altogether, explaining that she dealt with anxiety and depression, and sat out Wimbledon, too.

"I didn't know," she said Friday during a 13-minute news conference that included jokes and smiles, "how big of a deal it would become."

Fans returning to stadiums, many with vax cards, masks

Associated Press

College football fans will head back into stadiums this weekend, some of them for the first time in two years. Along with binoculars, sunscreen and other essentials, some will pack face masks and proof of vaccination.

With the availability of COVID-19 vaccines, the pomp and pageantry of fall Saturdays are expected to return in all their glory nearly everywhere across the country.

As far as Nebraska fan Capp Anson of Omaha is concerned, it beats the alternative. Last season, the Big Ten and Pac-12 allowed no fans and ACC, Big 12 and SEC teams limited stadium attendance to a fraction of their vast capacities.

"It's nice to be able to sit and

watch it on a big screen TV at home and have the bathroom by you or go grab a cold beer if you need to, but to me there's nothing like the experiences at the stadium," he said. "It brings out a good time for sure."

Anson's Cornhuskers were among the handful of teams kicking off their seasons Saturday, with a visit to Illinois in a Big Ten clash. UCLA was hosting Hawaii in the only other game involving a Power Five conference.

Schools are eager to let the good times roll again after the massive financial hits they took in 2020.

Coaches and players are happy to have fans back, especially in leagues where games were played in empty stadiums a year

ago. Colorado coach Karl Dorell said the home team's defense feeds off the crowd.

"So we're excited about everything being back to normal from that standpoint, having the stands back and having Folsom Field back and rocking," he said. "I think our players will be inspired on both sides of the ball from that, but it definitely helps the defense, no question."

Hawaii will not allow fans when it hosts Portland State next week because of a Honolulu ordinance barring large outdoor gatherings. No other school has announced an attendance limit, though specific attendance rules differ across the country.

San Jose State is asking fans to show proof of vaccination

when they come to its game against Southern Utah on Saturday night. Unvaccinated fans, or those who can't prove they've been vaccinated, will be let in but are required to wear masks at all times.

LSU, Oregon, Oregon State and Tulane have announced proof-of-vaccination requirements starting with their home openers next month. LSU will allow unvaccinated fans the option of showing proof of a negative COVID-19 test in the previous 72 hours.

The Oregon schools and Tulane mandate fans wear face coverings at all times, even though they play outdoors. Many schools have told fans they must wear masks while indoors at their stadiums.

Mahomes sharp as Chiefs roll to win over Vikings

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Patrick Mahomes and Tyreek Hill have talked openly about the Kansas City Chiefs chasing a perfect season.

Well, the two were nearly perfect Friday night.

Mahomes was 8-for-9 for 117 yards and two touchdowns in his only two chances with the ball, including a 35-yard TD strike to the fleet-footed Hill, and the Chiefs beat the Minnesota Vikings 28-25 to finish 3-0 in the preseason.

Now come 17 regular-season games and, Kansas City hopes, three more in the post-season.

"We didn't change the script," Mahomes said, "but we went through that pregame mock week. You had a couple preseason games they had played, and we went through that routine I've built. And having that and going against the defense playing a scout-team defense, we came out a little faster and crisper and were able to move the ball."

Mahomes only was miss a throw-away with nobody open. Mahomes finished his night with a short touchdown pass to tight end Blake Bell.

Panthers 34, Steelers 9: Sam Darnold completed 19 of 25 passes for 162 yards and two touchdowns, and host Carolina defeated the Steelers on Friday night in the preseason finale for both teams.

Darnold, who saw his most extensive action of the preseason, spent most of the first quarter under duress despite playing against a defense that was resting all of its starters.

Colts 27, Lions 17: Rookie Sam Ehlinger was knocked out of the preseason finale in Detroit with a knee injury, delivering another hit on the Indianapolis Colts' depth chart at quarterback.

Eagles 31, Jets 31: At East Rutherford, N.J., New York's James Morgan threw a 49-yard Hail Mary to Kenny Yeboah as time expired and Josh Adams ran in the 2-point conversion to produce the tie.

Raiders rookies not only ones with something to prove on young team

Associated Press

HENDERSON, Nev. — With the Las Vegas Raiders headed to San Francisco for their final preseason game Sunday, coach Jon Gruden said this year's lot of draft picks isn't the only group with something to prove.

"Well, it's all of our young players, last year's class and this year's class kind of combined," Gruden said. "We've had a chance to develop players, and that's all the coaches can do. We can draft, and we can trade, and we can sign guys. At the end of the day, coaches are here to develop players and I'm really excited about the job our staff has done. I've seen some of these young guys really get better."

With injuries taking their toll on several of last year's rookies, a total of 47 games were missed.

Five rookies saw playing time last season, Tanner Muse missed the entire season with a toe injury and Lynn Bowden Jr. was traded. Henry Ruggs (13), Bryan Edwards (12), Damon Arnette (9), Amik Robertson (8) and John Simpson (7) combined for 49 appearances.

Several from this year's class will see significant time, with tackle Alex Leatherwood joining a retooled offensive line, safeties Tre'von Moehrig and Tyree Gillespie rotating time with Arnette in an athletic secondary, linebacker Malcolm Koonce expected to help put a bandage on a banged-up corps along with safety Divine Deablo, who can slot in during nickel packages.

Fifth-round choice Nate Hobbs has been the biggest surprise of this year's rookie class and may have already earned one of the starting corner slots. Gruden said seventh-round pick Jimmy Morrissey is like having an extension of the coaching staff on the field and has put himself in a good position to make the final 53-man roster.

And while Sunday is the final dress rehearsal for several of those rookies and second-year players before the Sept. 13 regular-season opener on "Monday Night Football" against the Baltimore Ravens, there are those who know they're challenging older players for roster spots.

AP source: Saints to name Winston starting QB for opener

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — The Saints have selected Jameis Winston to succeed Drew Brees as starting quarterback for their regular season opener against Green Bay on Sept. 12, said a person familiar with the decision.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity Friday because the club has not announced the result of its preseason competition for the starting QB job between Winston and Taysom Hill.

The decision, first reported by ESPN, means Winston is set to start his first regular season game since the end of the 2019 season with Tampa Bay.

The Buccaneers chose not to bring back Winston, who they drafted first overall in 2015, when they had an opportunity to sign former Patriots quarterback Tom Brady in the spring of 2020.

While the Bucs went on to win the Super Bowl with Brady, Winston spent last season on a one-year contract with New Orleans, hoping to resurrect his career by learning under coach Sean Payton, who designs the Saints' perennially prolific offense, and Brees, the NFL's all-time leading passer, who announced his retirement in March.

This year, Winston returned to New Orleans on another one-year contract worth a base of \$5 million plus incentives worth an additional \$7 million and an opportunity to compete for an open starting job.

"What I look at is improvement, I've got to improve on everything, every single day," Winston said earlier this month. "Like, you can never get too good at execution, making it habitual, making my eyes faster, processing information faster. And that's something I'm challenging myself every single day, in terms of study and visualization and working out."

Now the 27-year-old Winston is on track to pursue the incentive pay in his contract and perhaps establish himself as more of a long-term fixture with the Saints if he can show signs of fulfilling more of the promise he was believed to possess when he won the Heisman Trophy and national title with Florida State in the 2013 season.

"This offense has seen someone who's mastered his offense for the past 15 years. So, I am never going to arrive," Winston said. "I'm going to continue to push myself and find ways to get better. Whether it's footwork, whether it's progression, whether it's accuracy. I'm just challenging myself."

Grandal drives in 8 runs in return

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Yasmani Grandal has some work to do when it comes to having enough energy for his catching duties after being sidelined by a knee injury.

His swing looks pretty good.

Grandal homered twice and drove in eight runs in his return from the injured list, and the Chicago White Sox beat the sloppy Chicago Cubs 17-13 on Friday night.

The eight RBIs for Grandal matched the franchise record and career best for the switch-hitter. He also doubled and singled.

"I felt pretty tired halfway through the game after running around, blocking, moving behind the plate, but it just comes with the job," he said. "Thank God that I'm back and I have a month of games to be able to get my stamina up and be able to feel good by the time the playoffs come."

The AL Central leaders are happy he's back, too.

"Evidently he's been doing a lot of work," manager Tony La Russa said, "because his swing was on time. I mean huge, huge production, it was really impressive."

José Abreu added three hits and two RBIs as the White Sox improved to an AL-best 43-23 at home this year. Luis Robert also had three hits and scored three times, and Yoán Moncada extended his hitting streak to 13 games. The White Sox improved to 4-0 against the crosstown Cubs, winning the season series for the first time since 2014.

The fourth-place Cubs scored six times in the first against Dallas Keuchel, but they couldn't hold on against the White Sox. Patrick Wisdom homered twice and drove in four runs and Michael Hermosillo hit a solo shot to go along with two impressive catches in center field.

Wisdom and Ian Happ connected in the ninth against former Cubs closer Craig Kimbrel before he fanned Austin Romine for the

final out.

"We just, we didn't pitch real well today," Cubs manager David Ross said.

The 32-year-old Grandal had an immediate impact in his first game with the White Sox since he tore a tendon in his left knee July 5 at Minnesota.

He connected for his 15th homer in the third, tying it at 6 with a towering three-run drive to right against Keegan Thompson in the rookie right-hander's third big league start.

"I set the tone from the beginning on the mound for us tonight, and just a long night," Thompson said.

With two out and runners on first and second, Robert hit a popup against Adrian Sampson (0-1) that shortstop Andrew Romine dropped for his second error of the inning. Andrew Vaughn scored to give the White Sox a 7-6 lead, and Eloy Jiménez capped the eight-run rally with a two-run single.

Braves nip Giants in meeting of NL division leaders

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Jorge Soler hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the seventh inning, Joc Pederson made a leaping catch at the wall for the final out and the Atlanta Braves rallied to beat San Francisco 6-5 on Friday night to end the Giants' five-game winning streak in a matchup of NL division leaders.

Wilmer Flores led off the ninth with a homer against Braves closer Will Smith to trim Atlanta's lead to one.

Buster Posey hit a two-run homer in his return to San Francisco's lineup. Adam Duvall also homered for the Braves.

A.J. Minter (2-4) pitched a scoreless seventh for the win. Losing pitcher Tony Watson (5-4) allowed three hits, a walk and three earned runs.

Yankees 8, Athletics 2: Giancarlo Stanton homered for a fourth straight game, Aaron Judge hit a three-run shot and New York extended its best winning streak in nearly 60 years to 13 in a win over host Oakland.

Stanton's 25th homer was

crushed an estimated 472 feet above a suite level and into the second deck of left-center.

Rockies 4, Dodgers 2: C.J. Cron hit a tiebreaking home run leading off the sixth inning, and Colorado won at Los Angeles.

The Rockies improved to 16-47 on the road in a game in which all the runs came on homers.

Nationals 2, Mets 1: Paolo Espino struck out a career-high seven while also singling and scoring a run for the first time in the majors, leading visiting Washington past New York, which lost for the 19th time in 25 games this month.

Only two players got beyond first base against Espino and four relievers. Francisco Lindor tripled with two outs in the first and was stranded when Javier Báez, who homered in the fourth, struck out.

Astros 5, Rangers 4: Michael Brantley hit a tying, two-run single as the sixth consecutive Houston batter to reach starting the seventh inning, and the AL West-leading Astros ral-

lied to win at last-place Texas.

Phil Maton (3-0) got the win despite allowing two runs in his only inning of work. Ryan Pressly worked the ninth for his 20th save in 22 chances.

Padres 5, Angels 0: Joe Musgrove pitched a three-hitter for his first complete game since his April no-hitter, and visiting San Diego snapped its four-game skid.

Musgrove (9-8) finished his second career complete game and shutout.

Cardinals 4, Pirates 3: Tommy Edman hit a two-run homer and drove in three runs, Paul Goldschmidt had three hits and St. Louis won at Pittsburgh.

Red Sox 4, Indians 3: Jonathan Araúz hit a three-run homer in the eighth inning after being recalled from Triple-A Buffalo before the game due to Boston's COVID-19 cases, sending the Red Sox to a win at Cleveland.

Twins 2, Brewers 0: Josh Donaldson's two-run home run in the first inning for host Minnesota stood up for starter Andrew Albers in a win over Milwaukee.

Tigers 2, Blue Jays 1: Victor Reyes hit a pinch-hit tiebreaking inside-the-park home run in the eighth inning and Detroit held on to beat visiting Toronto.

Rays 6, Orioles 3: Shane Bieber pitched a three-hitter for his fifth consecutive start, Mike Zunino hit a three-run homer and Tampa Bay won at Baltimore for its sixth straight win.

Reds 6, Marlins 0: Wade Miley pitched six-hit ball over seven innings, Tyler Naquin homered and extended his major league-leading hitting streak, and visiting Cincinnati blanked Miami.

Phillies 7, Diamondbacks 6 (11): Jean Segura singled with one out in the 11th inning to give Philadelphia a victory at Arizona.

Royals 8, Mariners 7 (12): Edward Olivares hit a two-run home run in the 12th inning, Salvador Perez hit a grand slam in a second straight game and Kansas City won at Seattle.