

US drone kills multiple suicide bombers

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — A U.S. drone strike blew up a vehicle carrying “multiple suicide bombers” from Afghanistan’s Islamic State affiliate on Sunday before they could attack the ongoing military evacuation at Kabul’s international airport, American officials said.

The strike came just two days before the United States is set to conclude a massive airlift of tens of thousands of Afghan and foreign civilians and withdraw the last of its troops, ending America’s longest war with the Taliban back in power.

The U.S. State Department released a statement signed by around 100 countries, as well as NATO and the European Union, saying they had received “assurances” from the Taliban that people with travel documents would still be able to leave the country freely. The Taliban have said they will allow normal travel after the U.S. withdrawal is completed on Tuesday and they

assume control of the airport.

At around the same time as the drone strike, Afghan police said a rocket hit a neighborhood near the airport, killing a child. Rashid, the Kabul police chief, who goes by one name, confirmed the rocket attack, and video obtained by The Associated Press showed smoke rising from a building around a half a mile from the airport.

The Taliban described the drone strike and the rocket attack as separate incidents, but residents of the Afghan capital heard only one large blast.

Two American military officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations, called the airstrike successful and said the vehicle carried multiple bombers.

U.S. Navy Capt. Bill Urban, a military spokesman, said the strike was carried out in “self-defense.” He said the military was investigating whether there were civilian casualties but that “we have no indications

at this time.”

“We are confident we successfully hit the target,” Urban said. “Significant secondary explosions from the vehicle indicated the presence of a substantial amount of explosive material.”

The strike came two days after an Islamic State suicide attack outside the airport killed at least 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members. The U.S. carried out a drone strike elsewhere in the country Saturday that it said killed two ISIS-K members.

President Joe Biden had vowed to keep up the airstrikes, saying Saturday that another attack was “highly likely.” The State Department called the threat “specific” and “credible.”

The Sunni extremists of ISIS-K, with links to the group’s more well-known affiliate in Syria and Iraq, have carried out attacks, mainly targeting Afghanistan’s Shiite Muslim minority, including a 2020 assault on a maternity hospital in Kabul.

Hurricane Ida hits Louisiana on Katrina’s anniversary

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Hurricane Ida blasted ashore along the Louisiana coast on Sunday, with the eye of one of the most powerful storms ever to hit the United States arriving near the barrier island of Grand Isle.

The powerful Category 4 storm made landfall on the same date Hurricane Katrina ravaged Louisiana and Mississippi 16 years earlier, about 40 miles west of where Category 3 Katrina first struck land.

Arriving with a barometric pressure of 930 millibars, Ida initially goes down as tied for the fifth-strongest hurricane to make landfall in the U.S. based on wind speed. Based on central pressure it is tied for ninth-strongest U.S. landfall.

Ida rapidly intensified overnight as it moved through some

of the warmest ocean water in the world in the northern Gulf of Mexico, its top winds grew by 45 mph to 150 mph in five hours.

Hurricane force winds started to strike Grand Isle on Sunday morning. Before power was lost on the Louisiana barrier island, a beachfront web camera showed the ocean steadily rising as growing waves churned and palm trees whipped. More than 100,000 customers had lost power in Louisiana by noon and were without electricity, according to the website PowerOutage.us, which tracks outages nationwide.

Wind tore at awnings and water began spilling out of Lake Ponchartrain in New Orleans. Officials there said Ida’s swift intensification from a few thunderstorms to massive hurricane

over three days left no time to organize a mandatory evacuation of its 390,000 residents.

Mayor LaToya Cantrell urged residents to leave voluntarily. Those who stayed were warned to prepare for long power outages amid sweltering heat.

In Port Fourchon, boats and helicopters gathered to take workers and supplies to oil platforms in the ocean and the oil extracted starts its journey toward refineries. The port handles about a fifth of the nation’s domestic oil and gas, officials said.

Along with the oil industry, Ida threatened a region already reeling from a resurgence of COVID-19 infections, due to low vaccination rates and the highly contagious delta variant. More than 2 million people live

around New Orleans, Baton Rouge and the wetlands to the south.

New Orleans hospitals planned to ride out the storm with their beds nearly full, as similarly stressed hospitals elsewhere had little room for evacuated patients. And shelters for those fleeing their homes carried an added risk of becoming flashpoints for new infections.

Forecasters warned winds stronger than 115 mph were expected soon in Houma, a city of 33,000 that supports oil platforms in the Gulf and Gulfport, Miss., to the east of New Orleans was seeing the ocean rise and heavy rains bands.

Gov. John Bel Edwards vowed that Louisiana’s “resilient and tough people” would weather the storm.

Biden commends US troops killed at Kabul airport

Associated Press

DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del. — President Joe Biden met in solemn privacy Sunday with the families of the 13 U.S. troops killed in the suicide attack near the Kabul airport, and became the fourth commander in chief to bear witness as the remains of the fallen returned to U.S. soil from Afghanistan.

First lady Jill Biden joined the president at Dover Air Force Base to grieve with loved ones as the “dignified transfer” of remains unfolded, a military ritual for those killed in foreign combat.

The dead ranged in age from 20 to 31, and came from California, Massachusetts and states in between. They include a 20-year-old Marine from Wyoming who had been expecting his first child in three weeks and a 22-year-old Navy corpsman who in his last FaceTime conversation with his mother assured her that he would stay safe because “my guys got me.”

Five were just 20, born not long before the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, that spurred the United States to invade Afghanistan in order to topple al-Qaida and dismantle their Taliban hosts who ruled the country.

At their deaths, the 13 young service members were on the ground for the U.S. coda to its longest war, assisting a chaotic evacuation of Americans and of Afghans who helped the U.S. war effort and are now fleeing the Taliban after their return to power.

“The 13 service members that we lost were heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice in service of our highest American ideals and while saving the lives of others,” Biden said in a statement Saturday. “Their bravery and selflessness has enabled more than 117,000 people at risk to reach safety thus far.”

Biden held his hand over his heart and appeared to shut his eyes in prayer as each flag-draped transfer case was taken off a military aircraft and put on an awaiting vehicle.

Biden was joined by several top aides, including Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Biden aide: US has ability to evacuate remaining citizens

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States has the capacity to evacuate the approximately 300 U.S. citizens remaining in Afghanistan who want to leave before President Joe Biden’s Tuesday deadline, senior Biden administration officials said Sunday, as another U.S. drone strike against suspected Islamic State militants underscored the grave threat in the war’s final days.

“This is the most dangerous time in an already extraordinarily dangerous mission these last couple of days,” America’s top diplomat, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, said not long before confirmation of that airstrike in Kabul, the capital.

The evacuation flow of Americans kept pace even as a new State Department security alert, issued hours before the military action, instructed people to leave the airport area immediately “due to a specific, credible threat.”

Biden’s national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said that for those U.S. citizens seeking immediately to leave Afghanistan by the looming deadline, “we have the capacity to have 300 Americans, which is roughly the number we think are remaining, come to the airport and get on planes in the time that is remaining. We moved out more than that number just yesterday. So

from our point of view, there is an opportunity right now for American citizens to come, to be admitted to the airport and to be evacuated safely and effectively.”

Sullivan said the U.S. does not currently plan to have an ongoing embassy presence after the final U.S. troop withdrawal.

But he pledged the U.S. “will make sure there is safe passage for any American citizen, any legal permanent resident” after Tuesday, as well as for “those Afghans who helped us.”

But untold numbers of vulnerable Afghans, fearful of a return to the brutality of pre-2001 Taliban rule, are likely to be left behind.

Blinken said the U.S. was working with other countries in the region to either keep the Kabul airport open after Tuesday or to reopen it “in a timely fashion.”

He also said that while the airport is critical, “there are other ways to leave Afghanistan, including by road and many countries border Afghanistan.”

The U.S., he said, is “making sure that we have in place all of the necessary tools and means to facilitate the travel for those who seek to leave Afghanistan” after Tuesday.

According to the latest totals, about 114,000 people have been evacuated since the Taliban takeover on Aug. 14.

UK military wraps up airlift mission

Associated Press

LONDON — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Sunday praised the “colossal” effort to airlift civilians from Kabul, as U.K. troops and diplomats flew home after the two-week mission, ending 20 years of British military involvement in Afghanistan.

In a video message, Johnson praised the “colossal exertions” of British troops engaged in “a mission unlike anything we’ve seen in our lifetimes.”

But his government is facing criticism for leaving behind hundreds, or even thousands, of vulnerable Afghans whom the United Kingdom had promised to protect.

The U.K. ambassador to Afghanistan, Laurie Bristow, was among those who arrived at RAF Brize Norton northwest of London on Sunday, hours after the government announced that all British personnel had left Kabul. More flights bringing back approximately 1,000 U.K. troops from Kabul airport were due throughout the day.

Britain says it has evacuated more than 15,000 U.K. citizens and vulnerable Afghans in the past two weeks, but that as many as 1,100 Afghans who were entitled to come to the U.K. have been left behind.

Vice Admiral Ben Key, who was in charge of the British operation, said: “We tried our best.”

US Forces Japan gets new commander

By **THERON GODBOLD**
AND **JOSEPH DITZLER**
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Lt. Gen. Kevin Schneider called out China, North Korea and Russia as threats to regional security as he handed the reins of U.S. Forces Japan to fellow Air Force officer Lt. Gen. Ricky Rupp.

“Stakes are higher today than they were in February of 2019 when I came into this job,” he said during a Friday ceremony that drew top brass and diplomats as guests. “Authoritarian regimes in Beijing, Pyongyang and Moscow continue to work to undermine peace and disrupt the security that has enabled economies to flourish.”

Schneider’s tenure was marked by heightened tensions with China in the western Pacific and a continuing coronavirus pandemic

that began 18 months ago. He was in charge at USFJ headquarters at Yokota in western Tokyo less than a year when the virus appeared in China.

During 2020, it played havoc with U.S. military bases in Japan, prompting sporadic, temporary lockdowns and restrictions on everything from travel to shopping and dining. Hundreds of service members, civilian employees and family members were quarantined on any given day.

From Tokyo, Schneider heads to the Pentagon to serve as director of staff at Headquarters Air Force, where he will “synchronize and integrate policy, plans, positions, procedures and cross-functional issues for headquarters staff,” according to USFJ.

He handed the unit flags to Rupp in front of about 100 people, including Adm. John Aquilino,

commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, and Gen. Kenneth Wilsbach, commander of Pacific Air Forces, who presided over the ceremonies, Japanese Defense Minister Yasuhide Nakayama, Jan Adams and Julia Longbottom, the Australian and British ambassadors to Japan, respectively.

As head of 5th Air Force, Rupp also leads about 15,000 airmen at three U.S. air bases in Japan: Misawa, Yokota and Kadena. Fifth Air Force provides a deterrent to would-be adversaries as well as airlift, combat and other aviation capabilities for the U.S. and Japanese militaries.

Rupp can look forward to more maritime and aviation challenges from the Chinese military and coast guard, whose ships and planes add muscle to its territorial claims in the region and challenge those of Japan.

US, S. Korea wrap up joint training

By **DAVID CHOI**
AND **YOO KYONG CHANG**
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — U.S. and South Korean forces completed a joint training exercise with little apparent notice from North Korea, which had complained the drills were a provocation, a Defense Ministry official said Friday.

The two allies on Thursday concluded their Combined Command Post Training, a computer-simulated military exercise. A four-day preliminary crisis management session was also conducted prior to the drills.

“South Korea and the U.S. ended the [command-post exercise] for the second half of this year after achieving training goals,” a South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff official told Stars and Stripes on the customary condition of anonymity Friday.

Despite Pyongyang frequently railing against such joint drills, “there has been no un-

usual activity from North Korea during the training,” the JCS official added.

A separate Defense Ministry official confirmed the account to Stars and Stripes and added that North Korean troops have been conducting their own summer training.

Both U.S. and South Korean military officials declined to provide details of the exercise, including the number of troops involved.

In recent years, the United States and South Korea have dramatically scaled back the number of troops for the annual drills. The allies postponed their last computer-simulated drill in February 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Despite the allies dialing back their drills, North Korea has sent heated statements through its state-run Korean Central News Agency in recent months. The regime routinely claims the drills are a precursor to a hostile invasion of its country.

Unvaccinated troops at Yokota not allowed out

By **JOSEPH DITZLER**
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Unvaccinated U.S. service members won’t be allowed off Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo until Sept. 9, according to an order from the base commander that took effect Friday.

The new policy also curtails activities by unvaccinated individuals on base, such as attendance at group events and use of the gym.

Base commander Col. Andrew Campbell imposed the order following a risk assessment of extremely high rates of COVID-19 in Japan, characterized by the delta variant, according to base spokeswoman Capt. Caitlin Mott.

“The Delta variant is more contagious than previous strains of the virus with varying levels of severity,” she told Stars and Stripes in an email Friday. “This risk assessment called for our action to protect our community.”

Campbell’s order appears to be the most stringent restriction on the movement of unvaccinat-

ed individuals on any installation in Japan. Bases have permitted vaccinated people greater latitude to travel and engage in activities than unvaccinated members.

But this order goes a step further by restricting access to the surrounding communities.

Large events and social gatherings, including non-mission-essential events at base clubs, award ceremonies and similar activities, are off-limits to unvaccinated individuals. The fitness center is also off-limits.

Campbell’s order also forbids unvaccinated visitors to the base, except those on official business or with permission from a sponsor’s squadron commander or equivalent authority.

Campbell’s order comes just days after Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin mandated all active-duty service members get vaccinated with the licensed version of the Pfizer two-dose vaccine. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration granted full approval to the Pfizer vaccine on Monday, the first coronavirus vaccine to attain that level.

School mask debate moves to courtrooms

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The raucous debate over whether returning students should wear masks in the classroom has moved from school boards to courtrooms.

In at least 14 states, lawsuits have been filed either for or against masks in schools. In some cases, normally rule-enforcing school administrators are finding themselves fighting state leaders.

Legal experts say that while state laws normally trump local control, legal arguments from mask proponents have a good chance of coming out on top. But amid protests and even violence over masks

around the United States, the court battle is just beginning.

Mask rules in public schools vary widely. Some states require them; others ban mandates. Many more leave it up to individual districts.

Big school districts that want to require masks are in court and battling governors in Florida, Texas and Arizona. Worried parents are suing over similar legislative bans on mandates in Utah, Iowa and South Carolina.

Suits fighting mask requirements have popped up in Missouri, Illinois, Michigan, Kentucky and Montana.

At the heart of the debates are parents, scared or frustrat-

ed for their children in an unprecedented time. The early court record is mixed, with victories for mask proponents in Arkansas and Arizona followed by back-to-back decisions in two big states going opposite ways. The Texas Supreme Court blocked another school mask mandate Thursday while a Florida judge allowed the rules to go forward Friday.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is recommending universal mask wearing in schools. Students age 12 and younger remain ineligible for COVID-19 vaccines.

Republican officials who restrict mask mandates argue

there are downsides to kids being masked all day and that parents should decide whether to put them on children, who are generally less vulnerable to the virus than are older adults.

But public health experts say masks are a key coronavirus prevention tool that do not pose health risks for children older than toddler age, and are truly effective when worn by a large number of people.

"This idea of parental freedom to decide what's best for their child is not unlimited. It has never been unlimited in our system," said Ellen Clayton, a pediatrician and law professor at Vanderbilt Law School in Nashville, Tenn.

Marchers call on Congress to bolster US voting rights

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Thousands of voting rights advocates rallied across the country Saturday to call for sweeping federal laws that would wipe out voting restrictions advancing in some Republican-controlled states that could make it harder to cast a ballot.

Many activists view the fight over voting rules as the civil rights issue of the era. But frustrations have mounted for months because two expansive election bills have stalled in the U.S. Senate, which is split evenly between Democrats and Republicans and the measures lack the votes to overcome a GOP blockade.

The rallies, which were held in dozens of cities, were intended to increase pressure on Democrats to rewrite procedural rules that would allow Democrats to muscle the legislation through without Republican votes. But they were also aimed at coaxing President Joe Biden to become a more forceful advocate on the issue.

"You said the night you won that Black America had your back, and that you were going to have Black Americans' backs," the Rev. Al Sharpton, who helped organize the national demonstrations, said at a rally in Washington. "Well, Mr. President, they're stabbing us in the back."

More than a thousand people turned out in sweltering heat on the National Mall on Saturday, the 58th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

His son, Martin Luther King III, used the occasion to call on the Senate to scrap the filibuster rule, which requires 60 votes for most legislation, including the voting bills, to advance.

"Our country is backsliding to the unconscionable days of Jim Crow. And some of our senators are saying, 'Well, we can't overcome the filibuster,'" King told the crowd. "I say to you today: Get rid of the filibuster. That is a monument to white supremacy we must tear down."

SpaceX sends ants, avocados, robot arm off to space station

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A SpaceX shipment of ants, avocados and a human-sized robotic arm rocketed toward the International Space Station on Sunday.

The delivery — due to arrive Monday — is the company's 23rd for NASA in just under a decade.

A recycled Falcon rocket blasted into the predawn sky from NASA's Kennedy Space Center. After hoisting the Dragon capsule, the first-stage booster landed upright on SpaceX's newest ocean platform, named "A Shortfall of Gravitas." SpaceX founder Elon Musk continued his tradition of naming the booster-recovery vessels in tribute to the late science fiction writer Iain Banks and his Culture series.

The Dragon is carrying more than 4,800 pounds of supplies and experiments, as well as fresh food including avocados, lemons and even ice cream for the space station's seven astronauts.

The Girl Scouts are sending

up ants, brine shrimp and plants as test subjects, while University of Wisconsin-Madison scientists are flying up seeds from mouse-ear cress, a small flowering weed used in genetic research. Samples of concrete, solar cells and other materials also will be subjected to weightlessness.

A Japanese start-up company's experimental robotic arm, meanwhile, will attempt to screw items together in its orbital debut and perform other mundane chores normally done by astronauts. The first tests will be done inside the space station. Future models of Gitai Inc.'s robot will venture out into the vacuum of space to practice satellite and other repair jobs, said chief technology officer Toyotaka Kozuki.

As early as 2025, a squad of these arms could help build lunar bases and mine the moon for precious resources, he added.

SpaceX had to leave some experiments behind because of delays resulting from COVID-19.

It was the second launch attempt, as Saturday's try was foiled by stormy weather.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Cow spotted in car at McDonald's drive-thru

WI MARSHFIELD — Spotted in a car at a McDonald's drive-through in Wisconsin: A cow — all of it.

Jessica Nelson of Mosinee pulled into the drive-through at a McDonald's in Marshfield and said she looked up to see a cow in the backseat of a Buick sedan three cars ahead of her.

She quickly picked up her phone and shot video of the bovine.

She posted the video on her Facebook page with the caption "A WHOLE FREAKING COW!!! Tell me you live in Wisconsin without telling me you live in Wisconsin."

Nelson said that the family of the cow's owner saw the post and contacted her. They said that the cow was actually a calf. She said the owner had just purchased it and two other calves — which were in the backseat as well but were lying down out of sight — at an auction.

'Historical' human bone found at dog park

NC ROCKY MOUNT — Police in Eastern North Carolina are investigating after a "historical" human bone was found at a dog park.

The Rocky Mount Police Department said someone reported finding the bone at the Best Friend's Dog Park and a "preliminary investigation" revealed it was human, news outlets reported.

"According to the anthropologist, due to the extensive weathering of the human bone, it is

historical, which means it is estimated to be close to one hundred years old," police said in the release. "The Rocky Mount Police Department will continue to investigate the situation."

Parents must pay \$30K for discarding porn stash

MI GRAND HAVEN — A judge ordered a western Michigan couple to pay \$30,441 to their son for getting rid of his pornography collection.

U.S. District Judge Paul Maloney's decision this week came eight months after David Werking, 43, won a lawsuit against his parents.

He said they had no right to throw out his collection of films, magazines and other items. Werking had lived at their Grand Haven home for 10 months after a divorce before moving to Muncie, Ind.

"Frankly, David, I did you a big favor getting rid of all this stuff," his dad said in an email.

Beekeeper electrocuted while removing bee hive

FL ST. PETERSBURG — A 54-year-old man who had been a beekeeper since he was 8 was electrocuted while attempting to remove a beehive at a home in St. Petersburg, officials said.

Jeffrey Johnston and another person went to the home of a fellow churchmember, and used a bucket lift to get the hive. Johnston touched an electrical wire, and was pronounced dead at the scene, St. Petersburg police said.

In a 2018 interview with the Tampa Bay Times, Johnston said he averaged about 700 bee removals a year.

"It was who he was, Jeffrey the bee guy," his 25-year-old son Jerick Johnston, told the newspaper. "He probably answered his phone like that."

Explosion blows roof off print shop in suburb

AZ CHANDLER — An explosion at a print shop in a strip mall in a Phoenix suburb blew off the roof and scattered debris around the building. At least four people were injured, Chandler Fire Department officials told local news outlets.

The injured were inside the print shop and were taken to a hospital for blast and burn injuries, with at least some in critical condition, news outlets reported.

A Fire Department spokesman did not immediately respond to queries from The Associated Press and no information was immediately available on a possible cause.

News video showed the building of Platinum Printing severely damaged, with debris scattered around the building, including some dropped on at least one parked car.

Scientists detect swarm of quakes at volcano

HI HONOLULU — Geologists said they had detected a swarm of earthquakes at Hawaii's Kilauea volcano, though it is not erupting.

More than 140 earthquakes

were recorded. The largest was magnitude 3.3. Most were less than magnitude 1.

At the same time as the swarm, scientists recorded changes to the ground surface of the volcano. That may indicate magma was moving beneath the south part of Kilauea's caldera, the observatory said. There's been no evidence of lava at the surface.

The observatory changed its volcano alert level to watch from advisory, meaning Kilauea is showing heightened or escalating unrest with more potential for an eruption.

Couple split jackpot due to 2 winning tickets

NC RALEIGH — A North Carolina couple split a nearly \$1 million lottery jackpot thanks to two identical tickets, a sudden windfall the pair said they will put to good use.

The North Carolina Education Lottery said Luther Cannon bought two tickets for Cash 5 jackpot at a convenience store in Rocky Mount. He punched in his numbers and gave one of the tickets to his wife, Constance.

When they saw his numbers won a \$997,400 jackpot, Constance Cannon said she started crying.

"It's just amazing that we won this amount of money," she said in a statement issued by the NC Education Lottery. "We can pay off our house and pay off our cars and be able to do something for our family."

After taxes, the Cannons each got \$352,830.

-From wire reports

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Illinois beats Nebraska in season-opener

Associated Press

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Under a new coach, with fans packed into the stands for the first time since 2019 and its backup quarterback at the helm, Illinois beat Nebraska 30-22 on Saturday to kick off the 2021 college football season.

The Big Ten conference win didn't come without a price for the Illini.

Illinois starting quarterback Brandon Peters left the game holding his left (non-throwing) shoulder after being sacked hard near the end of the first quarter. He was 3-of-4 passing for 35 yards. He did not return and was replaced by Artur Sitkowski, a sophomore transfer from Rutgers.

Peters' status wasn't clear following Saturday's game.

"No injury updates yet," first-year Illinois coach Bret Bielema said. "But as you could see, it was Brandon's non-throwing arm, so there's that."

Sitkowski engineered several long scoring drives using a balanced attack under Bielema's new system, which he worked to perfection during a successful tenure at Wisconsin.

Sitkowski was 12-for-15 passing for 124 yards, two touchdowns and no interceptions.

'Got something'

"I can't say enough about Art," Bielema said of his backup quarterback. "You know,

from day one he just projected a serious, very direct kind of personality. He walks like a quarterback and he talks like a quarterback. When I see our players rallying around a quarterback like that, well, you know you've got something."

Multi-faceted attack

The Illini rushing attack was led by Mike Epstein, who rushed for 75 yards on 16 carries, including a 45-yard run in the first quarter.

Huskers quarterback Adrian Martinez was impressive, racking up 232 passing yards on 16 completions. He had one passing touchdown and one rushing touchdown. Martinez was Nebraska's leading rusher, with 111 yards on 17 carries and one touchdown.

Gabe Ervin Jr. carried the ball 12 times for 19 yards and Markese Stepp had three carries for 10 yards and a touchdown for the Huskers.

Illinois scored on a defensive gem late in the first half when Keith Randolph Jr. sacked Martinez and knocked the ball loose near midfield. Calvin Hart Jr. scooped it up and scampered 41 yards for an Illini touchdown with less than a minute in the half.

Hart Jr. was injured late in the game and was helped off the field with what appeared to be a left leg injury.

Illinois led 16-9 at the break and took a 23-9

lead midway through the third quarter on a 2-yard touchdown pass from Sitkowski to tight end Luke Ford.

Frosty hot seat

Nebraska coach Scott Frost was being crucified on social media by furious Huskers fans before the end of the first quarter. Frost is starting his fourth year with the program currently under NCAA investigation. The university announced Aug. 18 the NCAA is looking into the football program amid allegations Cornhuskers staff improperly used analysts and consultants with Frost's knowledge and even moved workouts off campus last year when such activities were banned during the pandemic.

Frost is now a dismal 12-21 during his tenure at Nebraska.

The takeaway

The early changes Bielema has brought to the Illinois program paid off handsomely in a key early conference win. Despite losing its starting quarterback, the offense looked smooth all afternoon and the defense held when it needed to. This was a win in more ways than just on the scoreboard for Bielema and his coaching staff.

Martinez played exceptionally well, and provided nearly all of the Huskers' bright spots on offense. With Frost on the hot seat already, Saturday could prove a costly loss.

Coach Prime ready to take Jackson State to next level

Associated Press

Coach Prime, aka Deion Sanders, sauntered into the office of Nick Saban with a marching band following his lead.

"Coach Prime, what, no smoke machine?" the Alabama coach quizzically asked.

Yep, that happened — in a scene for an Aflac commercial featuring the two high-profile college head coaches.

It's the sort of splash Sanders hopes to make this fall in his second season at Jackson State. With that, another objective: Raising the profile of schools such as Jackson State and other historically Black colleges and universities.

"We're going to fight and do our darndest to start changing the landscape of HBCU football,"

Sanders said in an interview with The Associated Press. "Then, consequently, we can go to the next step and the next level. The fight is not going to be easy. Getting the players to commit to a historically Black college is not easy because you've got to level the playing field.

"You're competing against a Power Five that has 100 times more resources than we do, and the exposure," said Sanders, whose upcoming docuseries "Coach Prime" was to debut Sunday on Barstool Sports. "So it's not a level playing field whatsoever. But with the type of person that's coming to these historical Black colleges, I think we can."

Sanders took full advantage of his time on the commercial set with Saban, the architect behind

six national championship teams with the Crimson Tide. Sanders even brought some of his staff with him. In between commercial takes, they talked X's and O's.

"Nick Saban to a coach is like heaven," said Sanders, who partnered with Aflac in an effort to help close support gaps for HBCUs. "That's like a basketball player meeting (Michael) Jordan."

It's not the first time he's chatted with Saban. They also got acquainted when Saban was recruiting one of Sanders' sons, two of whom are currently on the Tigers roster.

"Definitely (can learn from Saban), just being on the set, seeing how he handles the staff, see how he handles himself, seeing the football side of it," said Sanders,

who was brought on board at Jackson State, located in Mississippi, last September.

The first step in turning around a Tigers team that competes in the Southwestern Athletic Conference was introducing a new mindset. So far, so good. They went 4-3 in a spring campaign.

This fall, a bigger test. His team opens with Florida A&M on Sept. 5 in the Orange Blossom Classic. It will be shown on ESPN2, one of eight times Jackson State is scheduled to appear on an ESPN network.

"I have so much hope," said Sanders, a Hall of Famer and two-time Super Bowl champion. "I'm optimistic all the time and I look for the good in everything and everybody."

Blaney wins, Reddick earns playoff slot

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — For all the potential outcomes that could have occurred at Daytona International Speedway on Saturday night, the NASCAR Cup Series regular-season finale was somewhat predictable.

Ryan Blaney ended up in victory lane for the second straight week. Kyle Larson, the most dominant driver all year, took home the regular-season trophy. Tyler Reddick ended up with the 16th and final playoff spot. And the race ended in overtime with a fiery crash that involved nearly half the field.

"It's Daytona. For me, it was no different than any other race here," said 2017 series champion Martin Truex Jr., who finished 30th. "I'm glad we're done; I'm glad we're out of here."

He was hardly alone. Drivers ripped the revamped aerodynamics package and beemoaned the usual aggressive driving that caused three wrecks in the final 20 laps.

Reddick got caught up in the first one but rebounded to finish sixth. He needed only to beat Richard Childress Racing teammate Austin Dillon and hope for a repeat winner to earn his first playoff berth.

Reddick and Dillon were both in contention to make a desperate, last-gasp push for the win in the two-lap overtime sprint to the finish. But Blaney, who was second on the restart, cleared traffic thanks partly to a bump from Corey LaJoie and was well ahead of the pack when a crash ended the race.

Daniel Suarez, one of 10 drivers in the front pack trying to win the race to earn the automatic playoff berth, turned Kevin Harvick to trigger the multi-car melee. Suarez seemed to be pushed into Harvick from behind by Kurt Busch.

Blaney, the winner in Michigan last week, heads into next week's playoff opener at Darlington Raceway with three victories this season in his Team Penske Ford.

"Yeah, we've got good momentum," Blaney said. "We'd like to make it three in a row, we'll see."

The regular-season finale had fairly low stakes since 15 of the 16 playoff slots were claimed beforehand. It meant only a first-time race winner could edge Reddick or Dillon for the final spot.

Neither had a smooth night: Reddick's car suffered crash damage in an earlier incident and Dillon was first flagged for speeding on pit road and also battled voltage issues in his Chevrolet.

"I don't know how to smile at this point. It was a lot tonight," Reddick said. "I'm excited to be past it."

Dillon had still rallied to fourth on the final restart but was collected in the race-ending crash.

"We gave it all we could and fought until the end," Dillon said. "We'll finish hard this year and build on next year."

The only other competition at Daytona was for the regular-season title, which went to Larson, a five-time winner this season. The race for the regular-season championship and its playoff points was between Lar-

son and Denny Hamlin, who entered Daytona trailing Larson by 28 points.

Hamlin held the regular-season lead for 22 weeks until Larson claimed it two races ago at Indianapolis. Larson overcame a 166-point deficit to Hamlin to earn the title.

"What an awesome year he's had," said team owner Rick Hendrick, who gave Larson a job this season after he missed most of 2020 while suspended for using a racial slur.

Chris Buescher finished second, one spot short of earning the automatic berth into the playoffs he was seeking. But it was a 1-2 finish for Ford.

"To miss that playoff spot by one spot, that's a tough ending to a day," Buescher said. "I'm sure I'll play it back and find something else different."

Bubba Wallace was a season-best third but frustrated he had no help from any Toyotas at the end of the race. Hamlin, his team owner at 23XI Racing, was the closest Toyota driver to Wallace at the finish — way back in 14th.

"I'm a little frustrated, I'm the one who gets called out for not working with teammates and I'm the one that gets left hanging," Wallace said. "There's a reason why Ford's in victory lane, cause they always work together."

Michael McDowell, the surprise Daytona 500 winner, blew an engine under caution Saturday and was done after 23 laps. He clinched a spot in the playoffs with his Daytona 500 victory, but McDowell has no momentum after finishing 20th or worse for the seventh consecutive race.

Players don't need vaccines to compete in US Open

Associated Press

NEW YORK — When Andy Murray sat in the U.S. Open's main interview room for a pre-tournament news conference Saturday, the moderator informed the 2012 champion he was allowed to remove the sort of light blue medical mask that has become so ubiquitous during the coronavirus pandemic.

Unlike the nine players who met with the media in that spot a day earlier, Murray chose to keep his mask on. And unlike roughly half the other men and women who will be taking the court when the tournament begins Monday, Murray has been vaccinated against COVID-19.

He wishes more tennis pros were. It sets up a couple of contrasts at Flushing Mead-

ows when it comes to a hot-button issue across society, especially as cases connect to the delta variant increase.

For one thing, players and their team members do not need to be vaccinated, but the spectators who have paid to watch them — and at some courts can get close enough to the action to offer high-fives — must be able to show they have had at least one shot.

Plus, among the players, there are those, such as No. 1-ranked Novak Djokovic, who frame the decision about whether to get a shot as a purely personal choice. And there are those, such as Murray, who explain it as being not just about protecting oneself but also about helping others.

"I feel like I'm enjoying kind of a fairly

normal life, whereas for the players that haven't, it's different. I'm sure they'll be frustrated with that. Ultimately, I guess the reason why all of us are getting vaccinated is to look out for the wider public," Murray said.

An ATP spokesman said Saturday that just above 50% of male players are vaccinated and the men's tour "continues to strongly recommend vaccination to players." A WTA spokeswoman said nearly half of female players are vaccinated and the women's tour "strongly believes in, and encourages everyone to get, a vaccine," with a goal of raising numbers "in excess of 85% by the end of the year," while not currently requiring athletes to get the shots.

A's halt Yanks' streak at 13

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Fresh off their first loss in more than two weeks, Aaron Judge and the New York Yankees immediately looked forward.

The Yankees' longest winning streak in nearly 60 years ended at 13 games Saturday when Frankie Montas pitched seven shutout innings and the Oakland Athletics held on for a 3-2 victory.

Judge hit a two-run homer in the ninth inning, but that's all New York managed against Montas and the A's bullpen.

"A loss is a loss. It's time to start another streak, that's all," Judge said. "We didn't get the job done, so it's time to turn the page. (The streak) showed what we're capable of. This team is capable of a lot of great things."

Judge has homered six times in 15 games. His power surge helped the Yankees boost their playoff position and put pressure on AL East-leading Tampa Bay.

Matt Chapman homered for the A's, who had lost six straight and 10 of 12 before handing the charging Yankees their first loss since Aug. 12 in Chicago against the White Sox.

Montas (10-9) was crisp all afternoon, allowing just two hits. He struck out six and walked one for his first win since July 29.

"Against that lineup, win-streak going and the way they're going, I don't know how you can pitch any better than that," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "(Montas) had an edge from the very beginning. A much-needed outing. Fantastic, maybe to an extent as good an outing as he's had all year."

Giants 5, Braves 0: Logan Webb threw seven strong innings to win his seventh consecutive decision, Tommy La Stella and Mike Yastrzemski each homered and drove in two runs, and visiting San Francisco beat Atlanta in a matchup of NL division leaders.

Webb (8-3) allowed five hits with one walk and six strikeouts.

Yastrzemski matched his career high by hitting his 21st homer off Richard Rodriguez.

Angels 10, Padres 2: Jared Walsh homered and drove in three runs, Justin Upton got his 1,000th RBI and host Los Angeles snapped its three-game skid with a win over San Diego.

Shohei Ohtani stole second to become the first player in team history with 40 homers and 20 steals in a season for the Angels, who won for only the second time in eight games.

Jack Mayfield also had a two-run homer for the Halos.

Eric Hosmer and Austin Nola had RBI singles in the fourth for the Padres, who blew their chance to pull within one game of Cincinnati for the NL's second wild-card spot after the Reds lost at Miami. San Diego (69-62) has lost five of

six and 13 of 16.

Dodgers 5, Rockies 2: Will Smith snapped a tie with a bases-loaded, two-run single in the eighth inning and host Los Angeles rallied to beat Colorado.

Mets 5, Nationals 3: Michael Conforto hit a go-ahead, three-run drive in the seventh inning for his first career pinch-hit homer and host New York beat Washington.

Phillies 7, Diamondbacks 0: Didi Gregorius hit three doubles, Kyle Gibson pitched six sharp innings and host Philadelphia blanked Arizona.

Marlins 6, Reds 1: Sandy Alcantara had a career-high 12 strikeouts in seven innings to help host Miami beat Cincinnati for the first time in six meetings this year.

Jesús Sánchez hit a three-run homer in a five-run first inning against Vladimir Gutiérrez (9-5).

Cubs 7, White Sox 0: Patrick Wisdom backed Alec Mills with two more homers and the Cubs beat the White Sox for the first time this season.

Rafael Ortega connected for a grand slam against Lance Lynn as the fourth-place Cubs improved to 6-19 in August.

Wisdom hit solo drives in the fourth and fifth innings. He also went deep twice Friday and became the first rookie in franchise history to post consecutive multi-homer games, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Twins 6, Brewers 4: Miguel Sanó drove in a pair of runs and host Minnesota outlasted the rain and Milwaukee.

Royals 4, Mariners 2: Salvador Perez homered for the third straight game, lining a two-run shot off the top of the fence for his 37th of the season to lead visiting Kansas City over Seattle.

Whit Merrifield also homered for Kansas City, which won its third straight over Seattle.

Red Sox 5, Indians 3 (10): J.D. Martinez hit a three-run homer in the 10th inning and visiting Boston beat Cleveland.

Blue Jays 3, Tigers 2 (10): Corey Dickerson's third opposite-field single of the game scored Vladimir Guerrero Jr. in the 10th inning and gave visiting Toronto a win over Detroit.

Blue Jays catcher Alejandro Kirk hit a 412-foot homer with two out in the sixth.

Astros 5, Rangers 2: Yordan Álvarez homered for the fifth time in eight games, Carlos Correa also went deep and AL West-leading visiting Houston beat rookie-laden Texas for its fourth straight win.

Rays 4, Orioles 3: Randy Arozarena hit a go-ahead, two-run homer in the eighth inning and visiting Tampa Bays beat Baltimore for the 11th straight game.

Cardinals 13, Pirates 0: Adam Wainwright baffled Pittsburgh, allowing three hits in seven innings as visiting St. Louis cruised to a win.

Ravens blow out Washington

Associated Press

LANDOVER, Md. — J.K. Dobbins going down with an injury overshadowed the Baltimore Ravens making a little preseason history.

Dobbins injured his left knee, Lamar Jackson made his 2021 preseason debut and Tyler Huntley scored five touchdowns to help the Ravens rout Washington 37-3 Saturday to win their NFL-best 20th consecutive exhibition game. Dobbins' uncertain status is the biggest lingering effect for Baltimore with the regular season on the horizon.

Coach John Harbaugh said Dobbins would undergo tests Sunday but declined to express how concerned he was about the injury. The second-year back was again expected to split carries with Gus Edwards in a run-heavy offense, and Baltimore may now need to get something out of Ty'Son Williams.

Bears hold off Titans

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Justin Fields is right where the Chicago Bears hoped he would be at the end of the preseason.

All coach Matt Nagy will say is that they feel good with where the Bears are with their quarterbacks, a group that includes Andy Dalton set to start the opener and veteran Nick Foles along with the 11th overall pick in Fields.

Foles threw a 54-yard touchdown pass to Jesper Horsted with 6:51 left, and the Bears held off the Tennessee Titans 27-24 to wrap the preseason Saturday night.

Horsted, a tight end who played at Princeton, finished with three TDs and 104 yards receiving, catching all five passes thrown to him.