

## China conducts missile strikes in Taiwan Strait

*Associated Press*

KEELUNG, Taiwan — China conducted “precision missile strikes” Thursday in the Taiwan Strait and in the waters off the eastern coast of Taiwan as part of military exercises that have raised tensions in the region to their highest level in decades.

China earlier announced that military exercises by its navy, air force and other departments were underway in six zones surrounding Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

Five of the missiles fired by

China landed in Japan’s Exclusive Economic Zone off Hateruma, an island far south of Japan’s main islands, Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi said. He said Japan protested the missile landings to China as “serious threats to Japan’s national security and the safety of the Japanese people.”

Japan’s Defense Ministry also speculated that four missiles flew over Taipei, the capital city, crossing the mainland, according to a statement its embassy in D.C. posted on Twitter. Taiwan’s Defense Ministry did not deny the claim, saying that the flight

path was “outside the atmosphere and is not harmful to the vast area on the ground it flies over.”

The drills were prompted by a visit to the island by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi this week and are intended to advertise China’s threat to attack the self-governing island republic. Along with its moves to isolate Taiwan diplomatically, China has long threatened military retaliation over moves by the island to solidify its de facto independence with the support of key allies, including the United States.

China fired long-range ex-

plosive projectiles, the Chinese military said in a statement. It also said it carried out multiple conventional missile launches in three different areas in the eastern waters off Taiwan.

“All missiles hit the target accurately,” the Eastern Theater Command said in its announcement.

Taiwan’s Defense Ministry said it tracked the firing of Chinese Dongfeng series missiles beginning around 1:56 p.m. Thursday. It later said it counted 11 Dongfeng missiles in the waters in the north, east and south.

## US: Russia to fabricate evidence in prison deaths

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — U.S. officials believe Russia is working to fabricate evidence concerning last week’s deadly strike on a prison housing prisoners of war in a separatist region of eastern Ukraine.

U.S. intelligence officials have determined that Russia is looking to plant false evidence to make it appear that Ukrainian forces were responsible for the July 29 attack on Olenivka Prison that left 53 dead and wounded dozens more, a U.S. official familiar with the intelligence finding told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Separately, a Western government official, who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity, said explosives experts who have reviewed photos of the prison released by the Russians following the incident have determined that the destruction wasn’t likely caused by “a high-explosive strike from the outside” and that it was “much more likely to be incendiary and from inside the location.”

Russia has claimed that Ukraine’s military used U.S.-supplied rocket launchers to strike the prison in Olenivka, a settlement controlled by the Moscow-backed Donetsk People’s Republic.

The Ukrainian military denied making any rocket or artillery strikes in Olenivka. The intelligence arm of the Ukrainian defense ministry claimed in a statement Wednesday to have evidence that local Kremlin-backed separatists colluded with the Russian FSB, the KGB’s main successor agency, and mercenary group Wagner to mine the barrack before “using a flammable substance, which led to the rapid spread of fire in the room.”

The U.S. official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the classified intelligence — which was recently downgraded — shows that Russian officials might even plant ammunition from medium-ranged High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, as evidence that the systems provided by the U.S. to Ukraine were used in the attack.

Russia is expected to take the action as it anticipates independent investigators and journalists eventually getting access to Olenivka, the official added.

Ukraine has effectively used HIMARS launchers, which fire medium-range rockets and can be quickly moved before Russia can target them with return fire, and have

been seeking more launchers from the United States.

Earlier Wednesday, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he is appointing a fact-finding mission in response to requests from Russia and Ukraine to investigate the killings at the prison.

Guterres told reporters he doesn’t have authority to conduct criminal investigations but does have authority to conduct fact-finding missions. He added that the terms of reference for a mission to Ukraine are currently being prepared and will be sent to the governments of Ukraine and Russia for approval.

The Ukrainian POWs at the Donetsk prison included troops captured during the fall of Mariupol. They spent months holed up with civilians at the giant Azovstal steel mill in the southern port city. Their resistance during a relentless Russian bombardment became a symbol of Ukrainian defiance against Russia’s aggression.

More than 2,400 soldiers from the Azov Regiment of the Ukrainian national guard and other military units gave up their fight and surrendered under orders from Ukraine’s military in May.

# Senate approves Finland and Sweden joining NATO

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Wednesday ratified the accession of Finland and Sweden into NATO, approving one of the most significant expansions of the military alliance in decades as the West fortifies Europe against Russian aggression.

Senators voted 95-1 to endorse membership for Finland and Sweden, more than the required two-thirds majority of 67 votes. Most of NATO's 30 members have already signed off on the accession protocols for Finland and Sweden, ushering in a historic end to the many years of neutrality and military nonalignment for the Nordic nations.

The U.S. had hoped to be the first to approve the addition, said Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., but it was the 23rd.

"Today — at a moment when democracy in Europe is under attack, as belligerent autocrats like [Russian President Vladimir] Putin clamor for European dominance —

the U.S. Senate is voting in overwhelming bipartisan fashion to approve Finland and Sweden's accession to the NATO alliance," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. "This is important substantively and as a signal to Russia: They cannot intimidate America or Europe."

Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., described the ratification as a "slam dunk for national security" and admonished those who opposed it.

Senators on Wednesday also approved an amendment proposed by Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, that reinforced NATO members' defense spending levels.

The legislatures of all NATO allies need to agree to admit Finland and Sweden before the countries could be protected by the alliance's mutual defense clause. The process is expected to take a year. In the meantime, Finland and Sweden can attend NATO meetings and have greater access to intelligence.

## Hiroshima atomic bombing survivor donates Obama painting to museum

BY HANA KUSUMOTO  
*Stars and Stripes*

HIROSHIMA, Japan — President Barack Obama's impromptu embrace of an atomic bombing survivor inspired a work of art that was unveiled near Hiroshima ahead of the event's 77th anniversary.

The emotional moment between Obama — the first sitting U.S. president to lay a wreath at Peace Memorial Park — and Shigeaki Mori was broadcast around the world on May 27, 2016, and roused artist Hofu Saida to pick up her brushes and paint "A Hopeful Sign."

"I was touched, and I was moved to tears naturally," she recently told *Stars and Stripes* by phone.

Obama, in the painting, symbolizes peace while Mori, who was 8 years old when the atomic blast threw him into a river on Aug. 6, 1945, represents war fire, said Saida, who

lives and works out of Toyama prefecture. Obama's peace extinguishes Mori's fire, she added.

Saida gifted the painting to Mori, who kept it in his home for several years until deciding last month to donate it to the Ikachi Lonesome Lady Peace Memorial Museum in Yanai city.

The small, private museum is dedicated to the memory of six U.S. aviators taken prisoner of war after their B-24 Lonesome Lady bomber crashed in Yanai on July 28, 1945. They were taken to Hiroshima and were among the 12 American troops who perished in the world's first atomic bombing.

"I was surprised to learn that he had treasured it, but also that he thought it was the right thing to do to donate it to the museum so that many people could see it," Saida said. "I was honored."

## Taliban: Unaware al-Zawahri was hiding in country

*Associated Press*

ISLAMABAD — The Taliban said Thursday they are investigating what they described as "claims" that al-Qaida chief Ayman al-Zawahri was killed in a U.S. drone strike in the Afghan capital.

However, the group insisted in a statement that it "has no knowledge of the arrival and residence" of al-Zawahri in Afghanistan.

The statement marked the first time the Taliban leadership addressed the U.S. announcement that al-Zawahri was the target of Sunday's strike. However, despite the Taliban's denial of knowledge of al-Zawahri's presence, U.S. officials have said the al-Qaida head was staying at a Kabul safe house linked to the deputy leader of the Taliban. The strike killed al-Zawahri when he stepped out onto the safe house's balcony.

His presence in Kabul and the killing have further strained relations between the Taliban and the West, particularly as Afghanistan's rulers seek an urgent infusion of cash to handle the catastrophic collapse of the economy that came after the U.S. withdrawal a year ago.

The Taliban had promised in the Doha Agreement not to harbor al-Qaida members or those seeking to attack the U.S. In the accord, the U.S. committed to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan and not to attack the Taliban.

On Tuesday, the Taliban's first statement on the strike only confirmed it had taken place, without mentioning al-Zawahri. In it, they condemned the strike as a "clear violation of ... the Doha Agreement."

In the new statement Thursday, the Taliban appeared to be trying to avert escalated tensions, particularly at a time when they and U.S. officials have been holding talks over \$3.5 billion in Afghan assets frozen in the United States.

The Taliban said they ordered "the investigative and intelligence agencies to conduct serious and comprehensive investigations on various aspects of the mentioned event."

The statement also assured the West "there is no danger from the territory of Afghanistan to any country, including America."

# Griner is sentenced to 9 years in prison

Associated Press

KHIMKI, Russia — U.S. basketball star Brittney Griner was convicted Thursday in Russia of drug possession and sentenced to nine years in prison following a politically charged trial that came amid soaring tensions between Moscow and Washington over Ukraine and could lead to a high-stakes prisoner exchange between the two world powers.

The 31-year-old Griner, a two-time U.S. Olympic champion and an eight-time all-star with the WNBA's Phoenix Mercury listened with a blank expression as an interpreter translated the verdict by Judge Anna Sotnikova. The judge also fined her about \$16,700.

President Joe Biden denounced the verdict and sentence as "unacceptable."

"I call on Russia to release her immediately so she can be with her wife, loved ones, friends, and teammates," Biden said, adding

that he would continue to work to bring home Griner and Paul Whelan, an American imprisoned in Russia on an espionage conviction.

Outside the court, the U.S. Embassy's charge d'affaires Elizabeth Rood called the verdict "a miscarriage of justice."

Before the unusually swift verdict was reached, an emotional Griner apologized to her family, teammates and the Russian city of Yekaterinburg, where she plays in the WNBA offseason, "for my mistake that I made and the embarrassment that I brought on them."

With her voice cracking, she added: "I hope in your ruling it does not end my life."

A conviction is usually a prerequisite to arranging a prisoner exchange and also allows Griner to apply for a presidential pardon. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said last month that the "necessary judicial

procedures" must be completed before any other steps can be taken.

The disclosure in July that the U.S. government was seeking a prisoner swap involving Griner reflected the growing pressure on the Biden administration to do more to bring her home. The U.S. State Department had earlier declared Griner to be "wrongfully detained" — a charge that Russia has sharply rejected.

Griner, recognized as one of the greatest players in WNBA history, has been detained since Feb. 17 after police said they found vape cartridges containing cannabis oil in her luggage upon landing at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport. She was returning to Russia, where she has competed since 2014.

When she took the stand at her trial July 7, Griner said: "I would like to plead guilty on the charges against me. But I had no intention of breaking any Russian law."

## Indiana congresswoman Walorski dies in car crash

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republican U.S. Rep. Jackie Walorski was killed Wednesday in a car crash in her northern Indiana district along with two members of her congressional staff and another person, police said.

The crash happened about 12:30 p.m. when a car crossed the center line on a state highway and collided head-on with the SUV Walorski was riding in, the Elkhart County Sheriff's Office said. Three people in the SUV, including Walorski, 58, were killed, as was a woman driving the other car, authorities said.

Walorski, who served on the House Ways and Means Committee, was first elected to represent Indiana's 2nd Congressional Dis-

trict in 2012. She previously served six years in the state's Legislature.

"She has returned home to be with her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Please keep her family in your thoughts and prayers," Walorski's chief of staff Tim Cummings said in a statement.

Walorski and her husband, Dean Swihart, were previously Christian missionaries in Romania, where they established a foundation that provided food and medical supplies to impoverished children. She worked as a television news reporter in South Bend before turning to politics.

Also killed in the crash were Zachery Potts, 27, of Mishawaka, Ind.; Emma Thomson, 28, of Washington, D.C.; and Edith

Schmucker, 56, of Nappanee, Ind., according to the sheriff's office.

Cummings confirmed that Potts and Thomson were members of Walorski's congressional staff. Thomson was Walorski's communications director, while Potts was her district director and the Republican chairman for northern Indiana's St. Joseph County.

Schmucker was driving the other car, according to the sheriff's office. The crash, which occurred in a rural area near the town of Wakarusa, is still under investigation.

Walorski was seeking reelection this year to a sixth term in the solidly Republican district.

## Firefighters partially surround deadly California fire

Associated Press

KLAMATH RIVER, Calif. — Firefighters have gotten their first hold on California's deadliest and most destructive fire of the year and expected that the blaze would remain stalled through the weekend.

The McKinney Fire near the Oregon border was 10% contained as of Wednesday night and bulldozers and hand crews were making progress carving firebreaks around much of the rest of the blaze, fire officials said at a community meeting.

The southeastern corner of the blaze

above the Siskiyou County seat of Yreka, which has about 7,800 residents, was contained. Evacuation orders for sections of the town and Hawkinsville were downgraded to warnings, allowing people to return home but with a warning that the situation remained dangerous.

About 1,300 residents remained under evacuation orders, officials said. The fire didn't advance on Wednesday, following several days of brief but heavy rain from thunderstorms that provided cloudy, damp weather.

"This is a sleeping giant right now," said Darryl Laws, a unified incident commander on the blaze.

In addition, firefighters expected Thursday to fully surround a 1,000-acre spot fire on the northern edge of the McKinney Fire.

The fire broke out last Friday and has charred nearly 90 square miles of forestland, left tinder-dry by drought. More than 100 homes and other buildings have burned and four bodies have been found.

The blaze was driven at first by fierce winds ahead of a thunderstorm cell.



# Clean water needed in flood-ravaged Ky.

*Associated Press*

FRANKFORT, Ky. — National Guard soldiers rushed to distribute bottled water to flood-ravaged eastern Kentucky as forecasters warned of more rain coming to the region.

In the days since historic flooding swamped the Appalachian region, the availability of water surfaced as a concern for victims after the floodwaters badly damaged water systems. As donations poured into the region, water was a top priority, along with cleaning supplies.

"We are moving water as fast as we can," Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said Wednesday.

National Guard soldiers had distributed more than 2,400 cases of water by early Wednesday, the governor said, as intense heat and humidity added to the misery as people continued shoveling out from the immense wreckage left by flooding that struck in the middle of the night a week ago.

Water service has been restored to many people in the region, the governor said. But work is continuing on heavily damaged water systems. Other systems were "wiped out," Beshear said. In some areas, it could take weeks or even months to repair water systems, he said.

"It's going to take significant time and significant dollars to restore what was destroyed," he said.

Water crews from across the state are assisting in the repairs, Beshear said.

Beshear said a special legislative session will likely be needed to devise a relief package for the flood-stricken region. The governor holds the power to reconvene lawmakers for a special session.

Beshear said a state relief package should include aid to repair water systems to spare the region's ratepayers from footing the repair costs through higher water rates.

"Because otherwise, they're going to go to ratepayers," he said. "So people who just lost everything that are rebuilding would have their water rates just skyrocket in what it would cost."

While the stifling heat and humidity continued to be a concern Thursday, the National Weather Service warned of more rain in the forecast for the region. Slow-moving thunderstorms could dump heavy rainfall and lead to more high water Thursday and Friday in areas still reeling from massive flooding a week ago, the weather service said.

Scattered thunderstorms with high winds were expected mainly Thursday afternoon and evening. Along with heavy rain, the storms could produce strong and damaging wind gusts.

The statewide death toll from the historic flooding is 37, the governor said. Amid the massive cleanup, families were preparing to

bury loved ones killed in the flooding. Initial expenditures from a relief fund opened by Beshear were being distributed to pay funeral expenses of flood victims.

The outpouring of support was evident across the area. Volunteers helped remove debris from homes, while others served meals. Beshear said it's a time for people to lean on each other and urged them to seek help in dealing with the trauma.

"Remember, it's OK not to be OK," the Democratic governor said. "I don't think our brains or hearts are designed to deal with trauma and loss at this level."

Teams searching streams in boats and combing debris-clogged creekbanks have rescued more than 1,300 people and crews were still trying to reach some people cut off by floods or mudslides. A few thousand customers still lacked electricity in eastern Kentucky. Emergency shelters and state parks housed hundreds of residents who fled homes that were destroyed or badly damaged. Many more are staying with relatives and friends.

Cooling centers were opened after forecasters warned of the risk of heat-related illnesses.

President Joe Biden declared a federal disaster to direct relief money to counties flooded after 8 to 10 1/2 inches of rain fell in just 48 hours last week in the Appalachian mountain region. The flooding also hit areas just across the state line in Virginia and West Virginia.

## Nuke talks with Iran resume in Vienna

*Associated Press*

Negotiators from Iran, the U.S. and the European Union resumed monthslong, indirect talks over Tehran's tattered nuclear deal Thursday, as international inspectors reported that the Islamic Republic is expanding its uranium enrichment.

The resumption of the Vienna talks, suddenly called Wednesday, appeared not to include high-level representation from all the countries that were part of Iran's 2015 deal with world powers. The negotiations come as Western officials express growing skepticism over the prospects for a deal to restore the accord. The EU's top diplomat has warned that "the space for additional significant compromises has been exhausted."

Iran's top negotiator, Ali Bagheri Kani, met with EU mediator Enrique Mora, Iranian media reported. As in other talks, the U.S. won't directly negotiate with Iran. Instead, the two sides will speak through Mora.

U.S. Special Representative for Iran Rob Malley also was on hand, tweeting Wednesday

that "our expectations are in check."

Mora also met Thursday with Russian Ambassador Mikhail Ulyanov, who has represented Moscow's interests in the talks. Ulyanov also separately met with Bagheri Kani.

"As always we had a frank, pragmatic and constructive exchange of views on ways and means of overcoming the last outstanding issues," Ulyanov wrote on Twitter.

But going into the negotiations, Iran laid out a maximalist stance. Through its state-run IRNA news agency, Tehran denied that it had abandoned its effort to get America to delist its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization as a precondition to a deal. That has been a main sticking point.

IRNA also quoted Iran's civilian nuclear chief as saying turned-off surveillance cameras of the International Atomic Energy Agency would be switched back on only if the West abandons an effort to investigate manmade traces of uranium found at previously undiscovered sites in the country.

Those positions could doom the talks.

## Car hits tents, killing 2 in LA

*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — A driver who was fleeing police crashed into a homeless encampment in South Los Angeles, killing a man and a woman, authorities said.

A man suspected of domestic violence drove off at around 12:30 p.m. Tuesday. Police didn't chase the man but found his car a short time later.

Police told KABC-TV that the driver lost control, hit a curb and rammed into two tents on a sidewalk, killing a man in one tent and a sleeping woman in another.

Their names weren't immediately released.

Police said the driver received minor injuries.

He could face manslaughter charges, investigators said.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Man accused of causing wildfire by burning spider**

**UT** SALT LAKE CITY — A Utah man has been arrested on accusations he started a wildfire while trying to burn a spider with his lighter.

Cory Allan Martin, 26, told deputies that he spotted the spider Monday while he was in a hiking area in the foothills south of Salt Lake City near Springville, according to a probable cause statement. He acknowledged starting the fire, but didn't explain why he was trying to burn the spider.

Utah County Sheriff's Sgt. Spencer Cannon said there is no evidence to suggest he intentionally started the blaze, but Cannon called it a reckless and puzzling decision. This area and most of Utah are bone dry amid extreme drought conditions.

Martin was arrested on suspicion of reckless burn and possession of marijuana and drug paraphernalia, court documents show.

**Electrical malfunction burned cheesesteak shop**

**PA** PHILADELPHIA — An electrical malfunction sparked a fast-moving fire that damaged one of Philadelphia's best-known cheesesteak shops last week, authorities said.

More than 125 firefighters and other emergency responders were called to the blaze at Jim's Steaks on South Street and battled the fire for more than four hours before bringing it under control. Officials said all employees were able to safely evacuate and no injuries were reported.

The Philadelphia Fire De-

partment said Monday that the fire marshal's office had "determined the cause to be electrical wiring."

Owner Ken Silver told The Philadelphia Inquirer that the air conditioning had been malfunctioning that morning. He said city inspectors had pronounced the building structurally sound and he vowed to rebuild.

**Bat infestation forces closure of fire station**

**NV** RENO — Fire officials have temporarily closed a small fire station between Reno and Carson City due to a bat infestation.

The Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District announced the temporary closure Tuesday of Fire Station 30 on Old Highway 395 in the Washoe Valley next to the historic Bowers Mansion.

Fire spokesman Adam Mayberry says bats have been flying in the living quarters and dead ones have been found in the apparatus bay where an ambulance is parked.

Officials thought they had solved a similar problem with bats in 2015 but they've since returned, creating new health and safety concerns.

During the closure, the ambulance based at Station 30, along with two fire personnel, will be relocated to another station.

**3 men indicted in thefts from firearms dealers**

**TN** NASHVILLE — Three Tennessee men have been indicted on federal charges accusing them in the theft of firearms from dealers, authorities said.

Tyler Cunningham, 22; Ryan Dillard, 36; and Corey Summers, 23, also were charged Monday with possession of stolen firearms, while Dillard was charged with being a convicted felon in possession of a firearm, U.S. Attorney Mark H. Wildasin said in a news release.

They are accused of stealing a truck from an automotive repair shop. The defendants allegedly stole nine firearms July 8 from a dealer in Greenbrier and 28 firearms on July 14 from a dealer in Woodbury. The defendants then allegedly offered to sell the stolen firearms to a third party, according to the indictment.

**Store owner, 80, shoots armed robbery suspect**

**CA** NORCO — A man armed with a rifle was shot by a quick-acting convenience store owner who pulled a shotgun out from behind the counter and opened fire during an attempted robbery in Southern California.

The faceoff was recorded by surveillance cameras at the convenience store around 2:45 a.m. Sunday in Norco.

Four suspects, their faces covered, pulled up to the business in a BMW SUV and walked inside the store with their rifles pointed, according to the Riverside County Sheriff's Department.

The owner grabbed a shotgun and fired one round from behind the counter, according to video aired by KCBS-TV. An employee identified the owner as an 80-year-old man to the TV station.

The suspects fled.

Authorities found the injured suspect in a hospital. The other three suspects were found at the

hospital in the BMW, which had been previously reported as stolen.

Three suspects were arrested and booked on suspicion of robbery and conspiracy. The main suspect remained in the hospital in critical but stable condition.

**'Guard cat' credited with preventing robbery**

**MS** BELDEN — A Mississippi man said his pet cat helped prevent a robbery at his home, and he credits the calico with possibly saving his life.

Bandit, a 20-pound cat, lives with her retired owner Fred Everitt in Belden. When at least two people tried to break into their shared home last week, the cat did everything she could to alert Everitt of the danger, he told the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal.

"You hear of guard dogs," said Everitt, 68. "This is a guard cat."

The attempted robbery occurred sometime between 2:30 and 3 a.m. on July 25, Everitt said. He was first awoken by Bandit's meows in the kitchen. Then, she raced into the bedroom, jumped onto the bed and began pulling the comforter off of him and clawing at his arms.

Everitt got up to investigate and saw two young men outside his back door. One had a handgun, and the other was using a crowbar to try and pry the door open, he said.

Everitt said by the time he retrieved a handgun and returned to the kitchen, the would-be intruders had fled.

— From wire reports

STARS  STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

Reporting  
World, National  
and Military News

# Browns' Brissett ready to step in for Watson

*Associated Press*

BEREA, Ohio — Deshaun Watson's suspension has forced the Browns to launch their backup plan — with the consummate backup quarterback.

Jacoby Brissett, though, has never thought of himself as a second option.

"I'm just another quarterback on the roster," he said.

With Watson being suspended six games — pending an appeal by the NFL — for violating the league's personal conduct policy due to allegations of sexual misconduct, Brissett, now with his fourth team, is Cleveland's short-term starter.

He's back atop a depth chart, a place Brissett has been before after making 37 starts during a seven-year pro career in which the 29-year-old has bounced from New England to Indianapolis to Miami to Cleveland.

Watson has been getting the bulk of snaps with Cleveland's first-team offense in camp, but that's likely to change soon now that the Browns know they'll be without Watson for at least six games and potentially more depending on what the league decides.

None of this is new to Brissett.

After being drafted by New England in 2016, he was thrust into the starting lineup as a rookie when Tom Brady was suspended for "Deflategate" and while Jimmy Garoppolo was sidelined with a shoulder injury.

Three years later, Brissett unexpectedly took over for the Colts following Andrew

Luck's stunning retirement in training camp. With Miami last season, Brissett was called upon after Tua Tagoviola got hurt in Week 2 and started five games.

Brissett is headed down a path he knows well.

"Since I've been in this league it's been the next man up," he said before Tuesday's practice. "That was the case my rookie year, so that experience helps with not only the playing but with the mindset of understanding that you've got to be ready whenever your number is called."

The Browns signed Brissett as a free agent one day after Watson waived his no-trade clause and agreed to join Cleveland. The team needed to add a QB with experience and one capable of leading a talented roster, especially if Watson was going to be out for an extended period.

Brissett was ideal.

"He's been in some different positions already in his young career," coach Kevin Stefanski said. "He has a very good way about him. Very, very intelligent. Very good leader. Has the ability to make plays on the practice field, help in the meeting room. Be accountable throughout the weight room. He just does all the right things."

Although he's among the team's new players, Brissett said it's comforting to know the Browns believe he can fill in for Watson.

"It feels good that you have that trust amongst the organization," he said. "I'm ex-

cited for the opportunity."

Browns linebacker Anthony Walker Jr. knows Brissett as well as anyone. He was teammates with Brissett in Indianapolis when he took over for Luck.

The Colts didn't miss a beat.

"He stepped in and he was a pro," Walker said. "He handled it the right way. People forget we were a really good football team with him as our starting quarterback before we had a lot of guys go down."

"We were rolling at that point but happened to take a couple of bad bumps. Jacoby's a pro. He's prepared, is going to prepare every day whether he's the starter or the backup. He's always ready so he doesn't have to get ready."

As Brissett answered questions for the first time since Watson's suspension, Walker lurked just outside the semicircle of reporters.

At one point, he caught Brissett's eye and the QB took a playful swipe at his teammate. "He's annoying as hell," Brissett joked.

It was a playful moment in this tense period for the Browns, who remain unsure of what's coming next for Watson.

In the meantime, the plan is to prepare Brissett for the Sept. 11 opener against Carolina, and perhaps five more games until Watson is eligible again.

Brissett smiled when he was asked how tough it will be to hand over the reins at 6-0.

"We'll cross that bridge when we cross that bridge," he said.

## NFL appeals 6-game suspension for Watson

*Associated Press*

The NFL is seeking an indefinite suspension of at least one year plus a fine in appealing a disciplinary officer's decision to suspend Cleveland Browns quarterback Deshaun Watson for six games for violating the league's personal conduct policy, a person familiar with the filing told The Associated Press.

The person, speaking on condition of anonymity because the matter isn't public knowledge, also said Watson would be required to undergo treatment before he could be reinstated. The league initially recommended an \$8 million fine and asked during settlement negotiations for at least a \$5 million fine plus a 12-game suspension that never materialized, another person involved in the talks told the AP.

The NFL's appeal gives Commissioner

Roger Goodell or someone he designates authority to impose a stiffer penalty. League spokesman Brian McCarthy said it's still to be determined whether Goodell or someone else will hear the appeal.

Former federal judge Sue L. Robinson issued her ruling Monday after Watson was accused by two dozen women in Texas of sexual misconduct during massage treatments while he played for the Houston Texans.

In her 16-page report, Robinson described Watson's behavior as "more egregious than any before reviewed by the NFL."

But her punishment fell far short of the NFL's request. So the league on Wednesday exercised its right to appeal, per the collective bargaining agreement.

The players' union has until the end of

business Friday to respond in writing. The union could challenge the appeal ruling in federal court, setting the stage for a prolonged fight. Both sides could still reach a settlement to avoid a lengthy battle. McCarthy said there's no timeline for Goodell or his designee to make a ruling.

According to the league's personal conduct policy, the appeal will be processed on an expedited basis. It will also be "limited to consideration of the terms of discipline imposed" and "based upon a review of the existing record without reference to evidence or testimony not previously considered."

The policy also states the "decision of the Commissioner or his designee, which may overturn, reduce, modify or increase the discipline previously issued, will be final and binding on all parties."



# Ferocious 49ers DL Young heads to Hall

Associated Press

Bryant Young straddled the classic football divide between discipline and ferocity more adeptly than just about any player of his generation.

For every minute of a 14-year NFL career spent entirely with the San Francisco 49ers, Young was a model teammate and a soft-spoken leader who selflessly made everybody around him better.

And for 60 minutes on most autumn Sundays, Young was one of the most intimidating, vicious defensive linemen his teammates and opponents had ever seen.

Young doesn't see that dichotomy as a contradiction. In fact, he loved the chance to get a little crazy while being a measured, mature man in every other area of his rich life.

"Football is a very chaotic, violent, physical sport," Young

said with a smile. "It's controlled chaos. You don't get better and you don't excel in the game by being this passive, nice individual."

Yet that's exactly what Young did as one of the most inspirational players and one of the genuinely nice guys of his NFL era.

In addition to his production and resilience at one of the sport's most brutal positions, Young's ability to inspire — both through his play and through his response to unimaginable setbacks on and off the field — finally earned him admission to the Pro Football Hall of Fame this summer, nearly 15 years after his last game.

Typically, Young felt a responsibility when he learned he'll finally get a gold jacket.

"I want to make sure that I do that well and handle it with

care," Young said. "I want to do a great job representing all the members of the brotherhood."

Young was a model of leadership, production and punishing play, but he wasn't a flashy attention-grabber on the field or a flamboyant personality away from it.

That's probably why he waited so long for his enshrinement — and why it might not have happened at all if a group of six offensive linemen hadn't been rallied together by the 49ers' former PR director last December to film a video testimonial nudging voters to choose Young.

One of the best three-technique defensive tackles of his era, Young had 89½ sacks and earned four Pro Bowl selections in an era rich with talent at the position. He earned an All-Pro nod in 1996, his most exceptional statistical season

with 84 tackles, 11½ sacks and two safeties.

Safety Lance Schulters played his first four NFL seasons alongside Young in San Francisco from 1998 to 2001. Schulters acknowledges he was a trash-talking defensive back who absorbed several lessons about professionalism and accountability from the taciturn Young.

"He didn't speak a lot, but when he spoke, you'd better shut the hell up and pay attention," Schulters said. "I learned from his toughness and mental fortitude, from his study habits — he would be the first guy in there, last guy to leave. Always on top of his game, taking care of his body. And then in the game, how he controlled and rag-dolled those guards, you couldn't believe it. He's an awesome teammate. I love BY."

## Branch's speed led to induction after long wait

Associated Press

Cliff Branch was the epitome of what Al Davis coveted in a receiver during his decades running the Raiders.

Branch arrived in Oakland with the game-breaking speed needed to fuel the Raiders' vertical offense. As soon as he learned to harness that speed and develop reliable hands, there was no stopping him.

Branch became one of the best deep threats of his era with some of his biggest performances coming on the game's biggest stages to earn a spot in the Pro Football Hall of Fame on Saturday.

"He was a game-changer," said Hall of Fame coach Tom Flores, who was a receivers coach for the Raiders when Branch arrived and was his head coach for seven seasons.

"He had one-of-a-kind speed and several gears with his speed. I had to coach him on how to slow down. That sounds ridiculous, but he was trying to run the routes I was teaching in mock speed and couldn't do it. He was tripping and clumsy, so I taught him to glide. He could glide faster than most people could run. Then when you have the need, turn it on."

Branch arrived in Oakland as a fourth-round pick in 1972 after catching just 36 passes his final two years in college at Colorado. But Branch was also a star sprinter who set the NCAA championship meet record in the 100 meters shortly before joining the Raiders.

That speed is what Davis wanted to team with future Hall of Famers Fred Biletnikoff and Dave Casper as the pass catchers for Ken Stabler. But it took until his third season for Branch to break out.

Flores said he was immediately impressed by Branch's toughness over the middle and ability to learn the offense, but the only issue that kept him off the field early on was his hands as the frequent drops led to boos from the home fans.

"His first year he was impressive, and when he was open he was wide open because he was so fast, but then he would drop the ball," Flores said. "But then in his third year, that's when he really started to shine. That was the whole thing with Al, speed and fear and big-play guys. And he was a big-play guy."

Branch made the first of his three straight All-Pro teams in his first season as

a starter in 1974 and never looked back. He scored 67 touchdowns through the air, leading the NFL in TD receptions in 1974 with 13 and in 1976 with 12. Branch also had a league-high 1,092 yards receiving in 1974.

He was a force in the postseason, with 1,289 yards receiving. The Raiders won Super Bowls after the 1976, 1980 and 1983 seasons — the last one in Los Angeles, where the franchise moved in 1982 after protracted court fights before returning to the Bay Area in 1995. Branch was one of six players to play in all three of those victories, a list that includes fellow Hall of Famers Ray Guy and Ted Hendricks.

In 1983, Branch tied the NFL record with a 99-yard touchdown catch in a regular-season game. He stands third among Raiders pass catchers in yards receiving with 8,685, trailing Tim Brown and Biletnikoff — both Hall of Famers.

The honor for Branch comes just over three years after he died at age 71 of natural causes, marking the second time in recent years that a Raiders great got inducted into the Hall of Fame posthumously. Stabler got inducted in 2016, a year after his death.

# Newcomers highlight Padres' latest win

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Juan Soto got multiple ovations in his first game with the Padres and Brandon Drury did even better, hitting a grand slam on the first pitch he saw with his new team to lead San Diego to a 9-1 victory against the Colorado Rockies on an electric Wednesday night at Petco Park.

The Padres unveiled their new-look lineup with Soto batting second and Josh Bell hitting cleanup a day after they were obtained from Washington in one of the biggest deadline deals ever. Drury was also obtained Tuesday, from Cincinnati, and put a charge into the already festive atmosphere with a grand slam off Chad Kuhl with one out in the first.

Manny Machado homered leading off the fifth and finished a triple short of the cycle in San Diego's fifth straight win. Jake Cronenworth had a two-run shot. The big beneficiary was left-hander Blake Snell (4-5), who struck out nine in six innings and won his third straight start.

Soto got a standing ovation from the sellout crowd when he ran out to his position in right

field in the first inning.

**Mariners 7, Yankees 3:** Luis Castillo (5-4) pitched five-hit ball into the seventh inning in his Seattle debut, and the visiting Mariners used a fast start to beat Gerrit Cole and New York.

Eugenio Suárez, Carlos Santana and Jarred Kelenic homered against Cole (9-4) during Seattle's six-run first. Jesse Winker connected against Wandy Peralta in the seventh, helping the Mariners match their season high for homers.

**Dodgers 3, Giants 0:** Julio Urias won his eighth consecutive decision and Miguel Vargas drove in two runs in his major league debut as visiting Los Angeles beat San Francisco.

Urias (11-6) threw six scoreless innings, struck out six and didn't issue a walk. The Dodgers — who wore patches on their gray jerseys to honor Hall of Fame announcer Vin Scully, who died Tuesday — won their fourth in a row and for the seventh time in eight games.

**Athletics 3, Angels 1:** Sean Murphy homered and drove in three runs off Shohei Ohtani, leading visiting Oakland past Los Angeles.

James Kaprielian (3-5)

pitched six-hit ball into the sixth as the A's snapped their three-game losing streak by beating Ohtani (9-7), who has no victories over Oakland in five mound appearances since 2018.

**Phillies 3, Braves 1:** Nick Castellanos hit a tiebreaking two-run homer in the eighth inning as visiting Philadelphia took full advantage of an overturned call.

The Phillies looked to be down to their final three outs when J.T. Realmuto grounded into what was ruled an inning-ending double play with the Braves nursing a 1-0 lead. But Philadelphia challenged the call, and the replay showed Realmuto's foot getting to the bag ahead of the relay throw while Rhys Hoskins trotted home from third.

**Mets 9, Nationals 5:** Daniel Vogelbach hit a grand slam for visiting New York, and Pete Alonso connected for his 28th homer.

**Astros 6, Red Sox 1:** Trey Mancini homered in his first start for host Houston, and Jose Urquidy (10-4) struck out 10 in seven scoreless innings.

**Orioles 6, Rangers 3:** Pinch-hitter Terrin Vavra lined a tie-breaking RBI double right after a disputed stolen base in the

eighth inning, and visiting Baltimore completed its first season series sweep against Texas.

**Pirates 8, Brewers 7:** Bryan Reynolds hit a solo homer to lead off the bottom of the ninth inning, powering host Pittsburgh past NL Central-leading Milwaukee.

**White Sox 4, Royals 1:** Lance Lynn (2-4) pitched six effective innings and José Abreu homered for the second consecutive game, leading host Chicago to the victory.

**Rays 3, Blue Jays 2:** Hits by newly acquired Jose Siri and David Peralta produced the winning run for host Tampa Bay.

**Twins 4, Tigers 1:** Jorge López got his first save with his new team and newcomer Sandy León drove in two runs, leading host Minnesota to the win.

**Guardians 7, Diamondbacks 4:** Amed Rosario hit a mammoth three-run homer and rookie Oscar Gonzalez added a solo shot, sending host Cleveland to the victory.

**Marlins 3, Reds 0:** Sandy Alcantara (10-4) threw his major league-leading third complete game and host Miami beat Cincinnati to snap a nine-game home losing streak.

## UConn's Bueckers lost for season after tearing left ACL

Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. — UConn women's basketball star Paige Bueckers tore the ACL in her left knee during a pickup game and will miss the entire 2022-23 season, the school announced Wednesday.

UConn said in a statement that Bueckers suffered the injury Monday and underwent an MRI that evening. It did not say where the junior guard from Hopkins, Minn., was playing when the injury occurred. It was the same knee she injured last year, causing her to miss significant time.

In a statement posted on her

Instagram account, Bueckers said she is leaning on her faith to move forward.

"It's so so crazy because you work so hard to get back healthy, you feel stronger than ever, and you are playing your best basketball and with one sudden movement it all shifts," she wrote. "It's hard trying to make sense of it all now, but I can't help but think that God is using me as a testimony as to how much you can overcome with Him by your side."

Bueckers was named the 2020-21 AP national player of the year, becoming the first freshman to earn that honor.

She averaged 20.1 points, 5.9 assists and 2.3 steals per game that season.

She missed 19 games last season after suffering a left knee tibia plateau fracture and torn meniscus in early December. But Bueckers returned to lead the Huskies to the Final Four, where the Huskies lost to South Carolina in the championship game at Target Center in Minneapolis, which is 10 miles from her hometown.

She finished the season averaging 14.6 points, 4.0 rebounds and 3.9 assists per game.

"We're all devastated for Paige," UConn coach Geno Au-

riemma said. "She's worked really hard to get stronger and healthier this offseason, and this is an unfortunate setback. Paige is obviously an amazing basketball player, but she's a better person and teammate and it's really unfortunate that this has happened to her. We'll miss her presence on the court, but she'll do everything she can to still lead and help her teammates this season. Our program will support Paige through her healing process to help her come back better and stronger."

UConn said Bueckers will undergo surgery on Friday at UConn Health in Farmington.