

FBI searches Trump's home in Florida

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The FBI searched Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate as part of an investigation into whether he took classified records from the White House to his Florida residence, people familiar with the matter said, a dramatic and unprecedented escalation of law enforcement scrutiny of the former president.

Trump, disclosing the search in a lengthy statement, asserted that agents had opened a safe at his home and described their work as an "unannounced raid" that he likened to "prosecutorial misconduct." He planned to meet later Tuesday at his Bedminster, N.J., club with members of the Republican Study Committee, a group headed by Rep. Jim Banks of Indiana that has said it is committed to putting forth his priorities in Congress.

Monday's search intensified the month-long probe into how classified documents ended up in boxes of White House records located at Mar-a-Lago earlier this year. A separate grand jury is investigating efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, and it all adds to potential legal peril for Trump as he lays the groundwork for another run.

Familiar battle lines, forged during a four-year presidency shadowed by investi-

gations, quickly took shape again Monday night. Trump and his allies sought to cast the search as a weaponization of the criminal justice system and a Democratic-driven effort to keep him from winning another term in 2024 — though the Biden White House said it had no prior knowledge of it, and the current FBI director, Christopher Wray, was appointed by Trump five years ago.

"These are dark times for our Nation, as my beautiful home, Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida, is currently under siege, raided and occupied by a large group of FBI agents," Trump wrote. "Nothing like this has ever happened to a President of the United States before."

"After working and cooperating with the relevant Government agencies, this unannounced raid on my home was not necessary or appropriate," Trump said.

Justice Department spokesperson Dena Iverson declined to comment on the search, including whether Attorney General Merrick Garland had personally authorized it.

The FBI reached out to the Secret Service before serving a warrant, a third person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press. Secret Service agents contacted the Justice Department and were able to validate the warrant before facilitating access to

the estate, the person said.

The Justice Department has been investigating the potential mishandling of classified information since the National Archives and Records Administration said it had received 15 boxes of White House records, including documents containing classified information, from Mar-a-Lago earlier this year. The National Archives said Trump should have turned over that material upon leaving office, and it asked the Justice Department to investigate.

There are multiple federal laws governing the handling of classified records and sensitive government documents, including statutes that make it a crime to remove such material and retain it at an unauthorized location. Though a search warrant does not necessarily mean criminal charges are near or even expected, federal officials looking to obtain one must first demonstrate to a judge that they have probable cause that a crime occurred.

Two people familiar with the matter, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation, said the search on Monday was related to the records probe. Agents were also looking to see if Trump had additional presidential records or any classified documents at the estate.

Langley takes over AFRICOM in 'historic moment'

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY
AND JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Marine Corps Gen. Michael Langley assumed command Tuesday of U.S. military missions in Africa, where countering China's growing influence and keeping terrorist groups in check will be at the top of the agenda.

Langley replaced Gen. Stephen Townsend, who has led the Stuttgart, Germany-based U.S. Africa Command for the past three years.

"I know I have a lot to do. We have a lot to do," Langley said during a ceremony at the command's Kelley Barracks headquarters. "I'm ready to embark on this mission."

Langley's promotion to lead AFRICOM also represents a momentous occasion for the Marine Corps, as he is the first Black

four-star general in the service's 246-year history.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who himself made history as the first Black leader to hold the top job at the Pentagon, officiated at the ceremony. He called Langley the best fit for the job as Africa is challenged by climate change, mass migration, Chinese and Russian interference, autocracy and terrorism.

"Your extraordinary achievement reminds (Black troops) that they belong," Austin said, adding that the reminder applies to women and others not previously welcomed by the armed forces as well.

"I could not be prouder to stand beside you in this historic moment," Austin continued.

Langley brings a wide range of experience commanding troops, including on the

African continent. He led Marine Corps Forces Europe and Africa in Stuttgart for about six months in 2020 and 2021 after his predecessor was removed over allegations of using a racial slur in front of junior Marines.

Before his AFRICOM post, he was in charge of all Marines based on the U.S. East Coast.

"Mike is a selfless and humble man," Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, said at the ceremony. "He accomplishes the mission without fanfare. He is what all commanders should be: decisive, able and a man of integrity."

Both Austin and Milley spoke to the importance of the AFRICOM mission, which seeks to provide stability, security and prosperity across a continent more than three times the size of the United States.

Taiwan: China drills reveal wider aims

Associated Press

PINGTUNG, Taiwan — Taiwan warned Tuesday that Chinese military drills aren't just a rehearsal for an invasion of the self-governing island but also reflect ambitions to control large swaths of the western Pacific, as Taipei conducted its own exercises to underscore it's ready to defend itself.

Angered by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's recent visit to Taiwan, China has sent military ships and planes across the midline that separates the two sides in the Taiwan Strait and launched missiles into waters surrounding the island. The drills, which began Thursday, have disrupted flights and ship-

ping in one of the busiest zones for global trade.

Ignoring calls to calm tensions, Beijing instead extended the exercises without announcing when they will end.

Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu said that beyond aiming to annex the island democracy, which split with the mainland amid civil war in 1949, China wants to establish its dominance in the western Pacific. That would include controlling of the East and South China Seas via the Taiwan Strait and imposing a blockade to prevent the United States and its allies from aiding Taiwan in the event of an attack, he told a news conference in Taipei.

The exercises show China's "geostrategic ambition beyond Taiwan," which Beijing claims as its own territory, Wu said.

"China has no right to interfere in or alter" Taiwan's democracy or its interactions with other nations, he added.

Wu's assessment of China's maneuvers was grimmer than that of other observers but echoed widespread concerns that Beijing is seeking to expand its influence in the Pacific, where the U.S. has military bases and extensive treaty partnerships.

China has said its drills were prompted by Pelosi's visit, but Wu said Beijing was using her trip as a pretext for intimidating

moves long in the works. China also banned some Taiwanese food imports after the visit and cut off dialogue with the U.S. on a range of issues from military contacts to combating transnational crime and climate change.

Pelosi also dismissed China's outrage as a public stunt, noting on NBC's "Today" show that "nobody said a word" about a Senate delegation visit a few months ago. Later on the MSNBC news network, she said Chinese President Xi Jinping was acting like a "scared bully."

"I don't think the president of China should control the schedules of members of Congress," she said.

US military warns of heavy rain, flooding in S. Korea

BY DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — Heavy rain and flooding killed at least eight people in South Korea on Tuesday and prompted the U.S. Department of Defense to warn its personnel there to prepare for more bad weather.

DOD advised service members near Seoul, the K-16 Army airfield and Seongnam city to "anticipate limited visibility ... build-up of

standing water and debris."

More rain is expected for Seoul in the coming days, according to the Korea Meteorological Association. The agency anticipates about 4 to 11.8 inches for the greater Seoul area and over 13.7 inches in surrounding provinces.

Dozens of people were displaced following the floods and search-and-rescue efforts are ongoing, according to a news briefing Tuesday by Gov. Kim Dong-yeon of Gyeonggi, the most populated province in South Korea and

home to Camp Humphreys, the largest U.S. military base overseas.

The South Korean military was working with the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure Headquarters and local governments on rescue operations and restoration projects, Ministry of National Defense spokesman Moon Hong-sik said at a news briefing. Moon said military assets sustained only minor damages from the flooding, including walls felled by the torrential rain.

Marines mark 80 years since Guadalcanal with call-sign shift

BY JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — The Marine Corps air wing in the Indo-Pacific adopted a new ceremonial call sign Monday, the 80th anniversary of one of its most significant trials, the Battle of Guadalcanal.

The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing — the aviation component of III Marine Expeditionary Force — changed its on-air identifier

from "Ice pack" to "Cactus," a callback to the Cactus Air Force that operated from Henderson Field during the six-month World War II fight on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands.

Wing commander Maj. Gen. Brian Cavanaugh signed the proclamation changing the call sign, according to a post on the wing's official Facebook page Monday. The wing is headquartered at Camp Foster, Okinawa, and its component groups and

squadrons are positioned at Marine Corps Air Stations Futenma and Iwakuni.

Cavanaugh recalled the historic tie that connects the wing to Guadalcanal and its mission today.

"That is why we honor the Marines of the Cactus Air Force and remember their ingenuity in the face of overwhelming odds with each use of the call sign 'Cactus,'" Cavanaugh's post said.

The "Cactus" call sign is for

symbolic or ceremonial use, wing spokesman Maj. Roberto Martins told Stars and Stripes in an email. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing was a year-old organization at the time of Guadalcanal, according to Cavanaugh.

"Changing the MAW's call sign to 'Cactus' was a decision grounded in both celebrating the 80th anniversary of Guadalcanal and recognizing the unit's significant contribution to that battle," Martins said Monday.

Blasts rock Russian air base in Crimea

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Powerful explosions rocked a Russian air base in Crimea and sent towering clouds of smoke over the landscape Tuesday in what may mark an escalation of the war in Ukraine. At least one person was killed and several others were wounded, authorities said.

Russia's Defense Ministry denied the Saki base on the Black Sea had been shelled and said instead that munitions had blown up there. But Ukrainian social networks were abuzz with speculation that it was hit by Ukrainian-fired long-range missiles.

Videos posted on social networks showed sunbathers fleeing a nearby beach as huge flames and pillars of smoke rose

over the horizon from multiple points, accompanied by loud booms. Crimea Today News said on Telegram that witnesses reported fire on a runway and damage to nearby homes as a result of what it said were dozens of explosions.

Russia's state news agency Tass quoted an unidentified ministry source as saying the explosions' primary cause appeared to be a "violation of fire safety requirements." The ministry said no warplanes were damaged.

Ukraine's Defense Ministry said sarcastically on Facebook: "The Ministry of Defense of Ukraine cannot establish the cause of the fire, but once again recalls the rules of fire safety and the prohibition of smoking in un-

specified places."

During the war, Russia has reported numerous fires and explosions at munitions storage sites on its territory near the Ukrainian border, blaming some of them on Ukrainian strikes. Ukrainian authorities have mostly remained mum about the incidents, maintaining an ambiguous stand.

If Ukrainian forces were, in fact, responsible for the blasts, it would mark the first known major attack on a Russian military site on the Crimean Peninsula, which the Kremlin annexed in 2014. A smaller explosion last month at the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in the Crimean port of Sevastopol was blamed on Ukrainian saboteurs using a makeshift drone.

Russian warplanes have used the Saki base to strike areas in Ukraine's south on short notice.

Crimea's head Sergei Aksyonov said ambulances and medical helicopters were sent to the base and the area was sealed off within a radius of three miles.

One person was killed, according to the regional leader of Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov. Crimean health authorities said six people were wounded, one of whom remained hospitalized. Others were treated for cuts from shards of glass and were released.

Officials in Moscow have long warned Ukraine that any attack on Crimea would trigger massive retaliation, including strikes on "decision-making centers" in Kyiv.

Russia curtails central Europe oil shipments

Associated Press

Several countries in Europe dependent on Russian energy suffered another blow with confirmation Tuesday that oil shipments have stopped through a critical pipeline.

Russian state pipeline operator Transneft said it halted shipments through the southern branch of the Druzhba oil pipeline, which flows through Ukraine to the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

Transneft cited complications due to European Union sanctions for its action on Aug. 4, saying its payment to the company's Ukrainian counterpart was refused.

The northern leg of the Druzhba pipeline, which runs through Belarus to Poland and Germany, was unaffected, Transneft reported.

EU leaders agreed in May to embargo most Russian oil imports by the end of the year as part of the bloc's sanctions over

Moscow's war in Ukraine.

The embargo covers Russian oil brought in by sea but allowed temporary Druzhba pipeline shipments to Hungary and certain other landlocked countries in central Europe.

Slovakia's oil pipeline network operator, Transpetrol, and the refining company Slovnaft confirmed that Druzhba shipments to the nation had stopped. Slovakia receives almost all its oil through the Druzhba pipeline.

Slovnaft, which is owned by Hungary's MOL energy group, said its production has not been affected.

Slovnaft spokesperson Anton Molnar said the company and MOL were discussing with Russia and Ukraine an option for MOL, or Slovnaft, to pay the transit fees.

Slovakia's economy minister, Richard Sulik, previously said his country has enough oil in its reserves for about 120 days.

Russian disinformation spreading despite bans

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — After Russia invaded Ukraine last February, the European Union moved to block RT and Sputnik, two of the Kremlin's top channels for spreading propaganda and misinformation about the war.

Nearly six months later, the number of sites pushing that same content has exploded as Russia found ways to evade the ban. They've rebranded their work to disguise it. They've shifted some propaganda duties to diplomats. And they've cut and pasted much of the content on new websites — ones that until now had no obvious ties to Russia.

NewsGuard, a New York-based firm that studies and tracks online misinformation, has now identified 250 websites actively spreading Russian disinformation about the war, with dozens of new ones added in recent months.

Claims on these sites include allegations that Ukraine's army

has staged some deadly Russian attacks to curry global support, that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is faking public appearances, or that Ukrainian refugees are committing crimes in Germany and Poland.

Some of the sites pose as independent think tanks or news outlets.

About half are English-language, while others are in French, German or Italian. Many were set up long before the war and were not obviously tied to the Russian government until they suddenly began parroting Kremlin talking points.

While NewsGuard's analysis found that much of the disinformation about the war in Ukraine is coming from Russia, it did find instances of false claims with a pro-Ukrainian bent. They included claims about a hotshot fighter ace known as the Ghost of Kyiv that officials later admitted was a myth.

A year after Kabul, Biden can't find footing

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The 12 months since the chaotic end to the U.S. war in Afghanistan haven't been easy for Joe Biden.

The new president was flying high early in the summer of 2021, the American electorate largely approving of Biden's performance and giving him high marks for his handling of the economy and the coronavirus pandemic.

But come August, the messy U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan seemed to mark the start of things going sideways for him.

It was a disquieting bookend to the 20-year American war: the U.S.-backed Afghan government collapsed, a bombing killed 13 U.S. troops and 170 others, and thousands of desperate Afghans descended on Kabul's airport in search of a way out before the final U.S. cargo planes departed over the Hindu Kush.

The disastrous drawdown

was, at the time, the biggest crisis that the relatively new administration had faced. It left sharp questions about Biden and his team's competence and experience — the twin pillars central to his campaign for the White House.

As the one-year anniversary of the end of the Afghanistan War nears, the episode — a turning point in Biden's presidency — continues to resonate as he struggles to shake dismal polling numbers and lift American confidence in his administration ahead of November's critical midterm elections.

"It was a pivotal moment that he hasn't ever really recovered from," said Christopher Borick, director of the Institute of Public Opinion at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania. "Things were going really well in terms of how voters viewed him in terms of bringing stability to the economy and how the government addressed the pandemic,

issues that are higher priorities to the American electorate than the war in Afghanistan. But Afghanistan cracked that image of competency, and he hasn't ever really been able to repair it."

The Afghanistan debacle was just the start of a series of crises for Biden.

As Biden was still dealing with fallout from the Afghan withdrawal last summer, COVID-19 cases began spiking again. Layered over that in coming months were strains on the economy caused by inflation, labor shortages and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The sum of it left Americans weary.

In the weeks before Afghanistan went sideways, Biden was riding high. His approval rating stood at 59% in a July 2021 poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. An AP-NORC poll conducted last month put his rating at 36%.

White House officials and Bi-

den allies hope the president is now at another turning point — this one in his favor, as the administration has recently racked up high-profile wins on Capitol Hill.

But the legislative accomplishments weren't rewarded with a boost in his standing with voters.

William Howell, a political scientist and director of the Center for Effective Government at the University of Chicago, said the biggest drag on Biden's standing with Americans has been runaway inflation and an unrelenting pandemic.

But the Afghanistan debacle became a defining moment in the Biden presidency, he said.

"Afghanistan remains significant going forward as he tries to make that central 2020 argument of competency," Howell said. "The images of Afghanistan are going to remain Exhibit A in the other side's rebuttal of the competency claim."

Post-Roe, elections for state Supreme Courts more urgent

The Washington Post

Mary Kay O'Brien had been working for a year to drum up interest in her campaign for Illinois Supreme Court, struggling to convince voters that it would affect them as a presidential or gubernatorial race would.

But "within 24 hours" of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to end federal protections for abortions, levels of interest in judicial races like hers skyrocketed, said O'Brien, a Democratic appellate judge.

"There's no question that it energized and mobilized, especially young people and women," she said. "It's something that I think was just a complete alarm bell to some people."

All over the country, the Dobbs decision has drawn attention to the power of state judiciaries, transforming once-sleepy races

into high-energy elections that could bring out voters focused on abortion and other civil rights issues, candidates, legal experts and party officials have said. Even where abortion has not yet been on the docket since the fall of *Roe v. Wade*, courts are making decisions on issues from gerrymandering to affirmative action.

In Ohio, Illinois, Michigan and North Carolina, which have partisan elections for state supreme court, this year's races could determine which party controls the state's top court, according to the University of Virginia's Center for Politics. They are among the 30 states holding state supreme court elections this year, with 85 seats on the ballot, according to a Ballotpedia database, though many of those are nonpartisan races or elections to retain a sitting judge, like in Kansas.

Jury selection begins in 2nd trial in Whitmer kidnap plot

Associated Press

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — Jury selection started Tuesday in the second trial of two men charged with conspiring to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in 2020 over their disgust with restrictions early in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prosecutors are putting Adam Fox and Barry Croft Jr. on trial again after a jury in April couldn't reach a verdict. Two co-defendants were acquitted and two more pleaded guilty earlier.

Dozens of prospective jurors from western and northern Michigan reported to the federal courthouse in Grand Rapids.

"I don't know if you feel like you won the lottery or just got called to the principal's office. But either way, welcome," U.S. District Judge Robert Jonker said.

The plot to kidnap the Democratic governor followed training in Wisconsin and Michigan and trips to scout her second home in northern Michigan, according to evidence in the first trial.

Fox, 39, lived in the Grand Rapids area and Croft, 46, is from Bear, Del. They communicated with other extremists who were angry with Whitmer and various public officials, evidence showed.

"This is not a political forum," Jonker said during opening remarks to the jury pool.

Convicting or acquitting can't be influenced by "whether you like Governor Whitmer or dislike Governor Whitmer," he said. "It's not if you think masking mandates or vaccine mandates or any other response was good or bad policy. It's not a proxy for any of those things."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman recants her kidnapping story

NM FARMINGTON — A Farmington woman who filed a false kidnapping report will not be facing charges, according to authorities.

The woman told police that two husky men pulled her off a sidewalk into a van that had blackened windows and no license plate. She said she was able to fight off the alleged attackers.

Farmington Police Chief Steve Hebbe announced that the woman has recanted her story and asked the public to exercise compassion for her.

“What we have here is a family and a young lady who is in crisis and right now she is actively seeking help for that which certainly is our goal,” Hebbe added.

Report: Dozens got sick after visiting splash park

KS GODDARD — A new federal study said dozens of people got sick after visiting a splash park near Wichita, Kan., last summer.

The study by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said 21 people contracted Shigella bacteria and six others became sick with the norovirus after visiting the splash park at Tanganyika Wildlife Park in Goddard. Another 36 people reported gastrointestinal illnesses after visiting the splash park but didn’t have lab tests confirming what caused their illnesses, according to The Wichita Eagle. At least four people were hospitalized afterward.

Previously, state and local health officials had said eight people who visited the park contracted Shigella and other people

tested positive for the norovirus, sapovirus and a type of E. coli called enteropathogenic E. coli.

4 in golf cart killed in crash at intersection

TX GALVESTON — Four people riding in a golf cart were killed — including two juveniles — when an allegedly intoxicated man driving an SUV ran a stop sign at an intersection in Southeast Texas, police said.

Miguel Espinoza, 45, has been charged with four counts of intoxication manslaughter in the crash in Galveston, roughly 50 miles southeast of Houston, police said. Galveston police Sgt. Derek Gaspard said that after the SUV failed to stop, it struck a pickup truck, which then crashed into the golf cart that had six people aboard.

Police said the adult driver of the golf cart was pronounced dead at the scene while a woman and two juveniles on the golf cart were taken to a hospital, where they died. The two other passengers — an adult and a juvenile — were hospitalized in critical condition, police said.

School district bans corporal punishment

LA OPELOUSAS — A Louisiana school system is banning paddling students, saying the time to use corporal punishment in the classroom is long past.

The St. Landry Parish School Board voted unanimously to specifically prohibit corporal punishment in the district’s police manual, the Daily World of Opelousas reported.

District employees can use

“reasonable and appropriate physical force” to prevent or defend a student or others being attacked, the district said.

Louisiana is one of 15 states that allows corporal punishment in school districts, according to the Louisiana School Board Association. Nearly 40 parishes in the state still allow paddling in schools.

Man charged with impersonating officer

MA BOSTON — Boston police arrested a man they said posed as a police officer and attempted to kidnap and rape a woman.

Charles Singleton, 51, of Boston, claimed to be a police officer when he offered a ride to a woman he’d met at a social gathering, according to police.

Instead, he drove the woman a short distance, pulled out a gun and ordered her to walk out into a dark field where he groped her and threatened to kill her if she didn’t comply with his instructions, police said. When the woman began to scream, Singleton assaulted her, took her purse and cellphone and fled.

Officers arriving said they located Singleton near his vehicle and recovered the woman’s personal items as well as a gun equipped with a laser sight that had been discarded nearby.

Man accused of stealing 5 vehicles in 2 states

AZ PHOENIX — A man has been arrested for allegedly stealing five vehicles, a trailer and a forklift in Arizona and Arkansas, according to authorities.

Arizona Department of Public

Safety officials said Brandon A. Jones, 37, has been booked into the Maricopa County Jail on suspicion of five counts of theft of means of transportation and one count of theft of controlled property after a monthslong investigation.

DPS officials said two homes were searched after task force detectives saw Jones allegedly driving and transporting the stolen vehicles and trailer between properties in south Phoenix.

A pickup truck and two SUVs reported stolen in Arkansas were recovered along with a flatbed and forklift reported stolen in Phoenix and two SUVs reported stolen in the Phoenix suburb of Mesa, DPS officials said.

1st sea turtle nest found on state beach since ‘18

MS PASS CHRISTIAN — Beach crews have found the first sea turtle nest on the Mississippi mainland in four years.

A Harrison County Sand Beach crew that was cleaning up found what appeared to be turtle tracks just east of the Pass Christian Harbor, officials said.

They protected the area and called the Institute for Marine Mammal Studies in Gulfport, which followed the tracks to a nesting site that is now marked off with stakes and tape.

The eggs likely belong to a protected loggerhead sea turtle or an even rarer Kemp’s ridley sea turtle, which is the most critically endangered species of sea turtle, said Moby Solangi, president of the marine studies group.

The exact species of turtle won’t be known until the eggs hatch in 50 to 60 days.

— From wire reports



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Serena: 'countdown has begun' on career

Associated Press

Saying "the countdown has begun," 23-time Grand Slam champion Serena Williams announced Tuesday she is ready to step away from tennis so she can turn her focus to having another child and her business interests, presaging the end of a career that transcended sports.

In an essay released Tuesday by Vogue magazine, and a post on Instagram — the sorts of direct-to-fans communication favored these days by celebrities, a category she most definitely fits in — Williams was not completely clear on the timeline for her last match, but it could happen at the U.S. Open, which begins Aug. 29 in New York.

"There comes a time in life when we have to decide to move in a different direction. That time is always hard when you love something so much. My goodness do I enjoy tennis. But now, the countdown has begun," Williams, who turns 41 next month, wrote on Instagram. "I have to focus on being a mom, my spiritual goals and finally discovering a different, but just (as) exciting Serena. I'm gonna relish these next few weeks."

Williams, one of the greatest

and most accomplished athletes in the history of her — or any other — sport, wrote in the essay that she does not like the word "retirement" and prefers to think of this stage of her life as "evolving away from tennis, toward other things that are important to me."

"I feel a great deal of pain. It's the hardest thing that I could ever imagine. I hate it. I hate that I have to be at this crossroads," she wrote. "I keep saying to myself, I wish it could be easy for me, but it's not. I'm torn: I don't want it to be over, but at the same time I'm ready for what's next."

Williams, 40, is playing this week in Toronto, at a hard-court tournament that leads into the U.S. Open. That will be the year's last Grand Slam event and one she has won six times, most recently in 2014, to go along with seven titles apiece at Wimbledon and the Australian Open, plus three at the French Open.

She also owns 14 Grand Slam doubles championships, all won with her older sister, Venus, part of a remarkable tale of two siblings from Compton, Calif., who grew up to both be ranked No. 1, win dozens of trophies and

dominate tennis for stretches — a story told in the Oscar-winning film "King Richard."

The official Twitter feed for Wimbledon posted this message Tuesday above a photo of Williams: "Some play the game. Others change it."

"I don't particularly like to think about my legacy. I get asked about it a lot, and I never know exactly what to say. But I'd like to think that thanks to opportunities afforded to me, women athletes feel that they can be themselves on the court," Williams wrote. "They can play with aggression and pump their fists. They can be strong yet beautiful. They can wear what they want and say what they want and kick butt and be proud of it all."

A victory Monday at the National Bank Open in Toronto was Williams' first tour win in a singles match in more than a year.

The American has won more Grand Slam singles titles in the professional era than any other woman or man. Only one player, Margaret Court, collected more, 24, although the Australian won a portion of hers in the amateur era.

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't

want that record. Obviously I do. But day to day, I'm really not thinking about her. If I'm in a Grand Slam final, then yes, I am thinking about that record," Williams said. "Maybe I thought about it too much, and that didn't help. The way I see it, I should have had 30-plus Grand Slams."

But, Williams went on to write, "These days, if I have to choose between building my tennis résumé and building my family, I choose the latter."

She and her husband, Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian, have a daughter, Olympia, who turns 5 on Sept. 1.

"Believe me, I never wanted to have to choose between tennis and a family. I don't think it's fair," said Williams, who was pregnant when she won the 2017 Australian Open for her last Grand Slam trophy. "If I were a guy, I wouldn't be writing this because I'd be out there playing and winning while my wife was doing the physical labor of expanding our family."

Williams said she and Ohanian want to have a second baby, and wrote: "I definitely don't want to be pregnant again as an athlete. I need to be two feet into tennis or two feet out."

Ravens reach 4-year extension with All-Pro K Tucker

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Justin Tucker made his new contract sound about as routine as one of his clutch kicks.

"I joked to (head coach John Harbaugh) one day out at practice," Tucker said. "We were just kind of just generally talking about the idea. I said, 'I think something could get done in like five minutes.' And sure enough, it took about five minutes."

Tucker and the Baltimore Ravens agreed to a four-year extension worth \$24 million. The agreement includes \$17.5 million guaranteed for the

kicker, whose previous deal was through 2023.

The contract was part of a feel-good Monday for the Ravens, who also welcomed running back J.K. Dobbins back from the physically-unable-to-perform list.

A five-time All-Pro, Tucker has been a game-changer for Baltimore in his 10 years with the team. He's made a record 91.1% of his field goal attempts, and his 1,360 points are the most ever by a player through his first 10 seasons.

"Justin is beyond what kind of a kicker he is and all of that, I would say the kind of leader

he is, the guy he is to be around," Harbaugh said. "Being out here with the mindset that he takes to it in terms of his work ethic, also his sense of humor, his understanding of the moment. Even in the meetings, he always has some kind of a comment. He laughs at my jokes, which I really appreciate."

Tucker set another record last year with a 66-yard kick at Detroit that won the game. He is 16-for-16 on field goal attempts in the final minute of regulation and has converted 58 straight in the fourth quarter and overtime, the longest

active streak in the league.

"This deal, for sure, checks all the boxes for me, and for all intents and purposes, this is the type of deal that will more than ensure that I will be a Raven for life," Tucker said. "And for that alone, I couldn't be happier."

Dobbins, who missed all of last season with a knee injury, came off the PUP list.

"I thought he looked pretty good in individual, first day back. He was out there in individual. You guys saw him moving around, running the ball-handling drill. That will be the first step," Harbaugh said.

Pats' Judon focuses on being himself

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — When Matt Judon isn't on the sideline for the New England Patriots, it's noticeable.

That's because during his six NFL seasons, the 6-foot-3, 275-pound linebacker's outsized personality and the trademark red sleeves he wears under his jersey, have stood out as much as his ability to cause disruption for opposing quarterbacks.

It made Judon an instant fan favorite in New England after he left Baltimore in free agency and signed a four-year \$56 million deal with the Patriots. He gave his new team plenty of return on that investment, appearing in all 17 games in 2021 and amassing a career-high 12½ sacks.

So, when he was absent for the Patriots' final two workouts to cap their second week of training camp last week, it got attention.

But back on the field Monday and practicing without restriction, Judon said it won't disrupt what so far has been a productive start to his second year in Foxborough. He even doubled down on his sleeves, wearing a thick, red hooded sweatshirt under his pads.

"I'm just making it harder on myself, just trying to sweat, get all the bad stuff out," Judon said. "I'd seen (former Ravens linebacker) Terrell Suggs wear a sweatshirt every day in camp. No matter the degrees, no matter the temperature. So, every day I'm out here, I'm trying to sweat it out."

As unbearable as that might sound, it ties in with an offseason that in part Judon spent taking time to get more comfortable living in Massachusetts and getting around the Patriots facility.

Gone now are the days when he had to use GPS for simple adventures such as finding a grocery store or restaurant.

"It's the same thing in the (Patriots facility)," Judon said. "I know how to navigate it without asking people for help," Judon said.

It's helped him return feeling a lot more mentally at ease and ready to attack the preseason.

"That's a big thing. I feel more at home," he said.

Judon is again being called on to be one of the anchors of a defense looking for fast improvements after ranking in the bottom

third of the NFL against the run.

Coach Bill Belichick said one thing that continues to stick out about Judon is that he remains "anxious to learn" as the defense adjusts to tweaks on that side of the ball.

Judon said that mindset is something he's clinging to heading into this season.

While several of those teammates say they look to him for leadership, he said he's still following the lead of several Patriots with longer tenures with the team, including fellow linebacker Ja'Whaun Bentley and defensive lineman Lawrence Guy.

But he's also trading notes with younger players such as linebackers Anfernee Jennings and Josh Uche, whose lockers are adjacent to his.

"That makes us all better, because we all see the game differently," Judon said. "We might get the same block or the same thing. And then we get different stuff because we're different rushers. ... And I've just played a little more football than those guys on a different team and different system.

"I think they're taking that, especially with what the coaches are teaching them and it's transitioning out here."

Getting heated: Fights disrupt Giants' practice

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — With the New York Giants ramping up practices in the middle of a heat advisory days before their first preseason game, it was only a matter of time before tempers erupted.

In a span a four plays Monday, running back Saquon Barkley plowed over cornerback Aaron Robinson and linebacker Tae Crowder got into it with free agent running back Antonio Williams.

The main attraction was starting center Jon Feliciano seemingly kneeling Crowder on an ensuing play, an incident which emptied both sidelines onto the field.

Linebacker Cam Brown eventually grabbed the back of Feliciano's jersey and dragged him out of a scrum of 50 players. The center then got on his feet and threw a haymaker

at Brown that seemed to connect with his helmet. Brown tried to swing back but didn't seem to connect.

Shortly after teammates separated the two, offensive line coach Bobby Johnson pushed Brown.

The incidents caused coach Brian Daboll to call the team together and he spoke for five minutes before practice resumed without incident.

Daboll did not speak to reporters on Monday. The team refused to take requests from reporters to speak with Feliciano, Brown, Barkley and Crowder.

"In practice, it's tough not to be offensive versus defense against each other," veteran safety Julian Love said. "And so you get some physicality. You got some younger coaches with guys who play the game, you know, the testosterone is high at

times. And so it is what it is."

Veteran linebacker Jihad Ward smiled and said he didn't see much of what was happening, sarcastically saying he was looking at his playbook. He said most of the players were in the locker room giggling, laughing, playing music and chilling after practice.

"This ain't nothing compared to just jawing small, man," Ward said. "People outside are going to look at and say 'Oh, it's crazy. But you know, this ain't nothing going on, we are going to laugh at it in the locker room."

While some felt Barkley showed a little too much aggressiveness running over Robinson, Love had no problem with it.

"He's you know, he's Saquon Barkley, what, the No. 2 pick," Love said. "He's a guy who's big, strong, we call them

'Quads. And that's the type of running we want."

Love also had no problem with Crowder answering for the defense on the next play, when he went after the ball with Williams down. He said defensive coordinator Wink Martindale wants his players to stand up for each other.

"The intensity was raising as you guys saw," Love said. "Something was bound to happen. And as long as we have each other's back, we're going to ride for each other, that all are the makings of a great defense."

Rookie tight end Daniel Bellinger said it was just hot.

"When it's 95 degrees outside, stuff is going to happen, but it just showed a good physicality for us today," the fourth-round draft pick from San Diego State said. "I think it was a good sign for us just going out there and being physical."

Bassitt, Mets widen lead in NL East

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Chris Bassitt scattered eight hits over eight innings and Starling Marte hit a two-run homer in the first, leading the New York Mets to a 5-1 win over the Cincinnati Reds on Monday night.

With their 13th victory in 15 games, the Mets extended their NL East lead to seven games over idle Atlanta.

Bassitt (9-7) allowed an unearned run and struck out eight. He threw 114 pitches, the most by a New York starter this year and two shy of his career high set in August 2019.

Reds starter and former Mets prospect Justin Dunn (0-1) permitted three runs and five hits in 4⅓ innings. He was pitching in the majors for the first time since June 2021.

Daniel Vogelbach had an RBI single in the fourth and ex-Cincinnati outfielder Tyler Naquin added a two-run triple in the eighth. Naquin was acquired from the Reds in a July 28 trade.

Yankees 9, Mariners 4: Aaron Judge hit his 44th homer, Josh Donaldson went deep and drove in three runs, and visiting

New York snapped a five-game losing streak by beating Seattle.

Donaldson doubled twice and Andrew Benintendi also had two doubles and three RBIs as the Yankees hammered Mariners pitching. But it wasn't a perfect night — Matt Carpenter broke his left foot when he fouled off a pitch in the first inning.

Donaldson and Benintendi got it started as New York knocked around Logan Gilbert (10-5) for seven earned runs and 10 hits — six for extra bases — in four-plus innings.

Giants 1, Padres 0: Alex Wood (8-9) held sputtering San Diego to three singles in 6⅓ innings and visiting San Francisco benefited from an overturned call to win the game.

Giants reliever Camino Doval retired the heart of the Padres' order in the ninth — Juan Soto, Manny Machado and Josh Bell — to earn his 15th save.

It was the fifth straight loss and second consecutive shutout for San Diego, which fell to 1-5 since obtaining Soto and Bell in a blockbuster trade last Tuesday. Its streak of scoreless innings reached 23 dating back to

Saturday.

Orioles 7, Blue Jays 4: Ramón Urías hit a three-run homer in the first inning, and Anthony Santander, Ryan Mountcastle and Austin Hays also went deep to lift host Baltimore over Toronto.

The Orioles, who entered the day two games behind Seattle and Tampa Bay for the final two wild cards in the American League, pulled within three of Toronto for the first wild card. This was the first of 15 meetings down the stretch between the Blue Jays and Baltimore.

Orioles starter Jordan Lyles (9-8) yielded two runs and eight hits in 5⅓ innings. Félix Bautista got four outs for his fifth save.

Cubs 6, Nationals 3: Keegan Thompson (9-5) pitched six effective innings, and rookies Nelson Velázquez and Christopher Morel homered in the third as host Chicago beat skidding Washington.

Thompson gave up five hits and didn't walk a batter. Luke Voit homered in the sixth to end the shutout bid.

Pinch-hitter Joey Meneses launched a two-run homer for the Nationals in the eighth. Ro-

wan Wick pitched a scoreless ninth for his fifth save.

Angels 1, Athletics 0: José Suarez (4-4) struck out eight in seven superb innings to out-pitch fellow lefty Cole Irvin in visiting Los Angeles' victory over Oakland.

Luis Rengifo homered in the first and it held up. Suarez gave up two hits while earning his second straight win against the Athletics. He hasn't allowed an earned run in his last 18 innings.

Aaron Loup pitched the eighth and Ryan Tepera finished for his second save to close out the two-hit shutout in just 2 hours, 14 minutes.

Diamondbacks 3, Pirates 0: Zac Gallen (7-2) pitched seven dominant innings, Ketel Marte hit a two-run single in the eighth and host Arizona blanked Pittsburgh.

Gallen gave up three hits and two walks while striking out eight on 89 pitches. The seven innings matched a career high he's reached 13 times.

Joe Mantiply worked a perfect eighth and Ian Kennedy handled the ninth for his seventh save.

Rhule: Panthers look to avoid 'wrong decision' at QB

Associated Press

SPARTANBURG, S.C. — Two weeks into training camp and the Carolina Panthers' quarterback situation remains unsettled.

Coach Matt Rhule said both Baker Mayfield and Sam Darnold have had good days, but he's not ready to declare a starter. Rhule said that decision could come after the team's second preseason game against the New England Patriots on Aug. 19, one that would allow one quarterback to settle in and get the majority of the work in practice.

In the meantime, Mayfield

and Darnold — the No. 1 and 3 overall picks in the 2018 draft, respectively — continue to split reps at Wofford College as the Panthers work through the process.

Rhule said the Panthers haven't wanted to rush the decision, saying "the important thing is finding the right guy."

"I don't want to start one guy and then realize after two games we made the wrong decision and go back to the other guy," Rhule said.

Rhule hasn't decided who'll start the team's preseason opener on Saturday night at Washington.

When asked if there has been any separation between the QBs at camp, Rhule said, "I know that one quarterback has played better than the other quarterback one day and then there has been some other things the next day. ... I think it's been back and forth."

Rhule said he expects Mayfield and Darnold on the final 53-man roster, along with a third quarterback. He was quick to point out the need for depth, citing that only 12 NFL quarterbacks started all 17 regular-season games last season.

So, the competition rages on. Mayfield has refrained from

rocking the boat and saying he deserves to be the starter, even though he has looked sharper than Darnold at training camp.

"It's probably human nature to want more reps," Mayfield said. "Sam would probably say the same thing. To me it's about improving — to get myself to be playing the best quarterback I can and to be playing at a high level. I'm just going to put my head down and work. That's what I know how to do."

Rhule said Mayfield, who's still learning offensive coordinator Ben McAdoo's playbook after being acquired on July 6, is "definitely improving."