

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Russia desperate to replenish troops

Associated Press

The prisoners at the penal colony in St. Petersburg were expecting a visit by officials, thinking it would be some sort of inspection. Instead, men in uniform arrived and offered them amnesty — if they agreed to fight alongside the Russian army in Ukraine.

Over the following days, about a dozen or so left the prison, according to a woman whose boyfriend is serving a sentence there. Speaking on the condition of anonymity because she feared reprisals, the woman said her boyfriend wasn't among the volunteers, although with years left on his sentence, he "couldn't not think about it."

As Russia continues to suffer losses in its invasion of Ukraine, now nearing its sixth month, the Kremlin has refused to announce a full-blown mobilization — a move that could be very unpopular for President Vladimir Putin. That has instead led to a covert recruitment effort that includes using prisoners to make up the manpower shortage.

This is also happening amid re-

ports hundreds of Russian soldiers are refusing to fight and trying to quit the military.

"We're seeing a huge outflow of people who want to leave the war zone—those who have been serving for a long time and those who have signed a contract just recently," said Alexei Tabalov, a lawyer who runs the Conscript's School legal aid group.

The group has seen an influx of requests from men who want to terminate their contracts, "and I personally get the impression that everyone who can is ready to run away," Tabalov said in an interview with The Associated Press. "And the Defense Ministry is digging deep to find those it can persuade to serve."

Although the Defense Ministry has denied any "mobilization activities" are taking place, authorities seem to be pulling out all the stops to bolster enlistment. Billboards and public transit ads in various regions proclaim, "This is The Job," urging men to join the professional army. Authorities have set up mobile recruiting centers in some cities, including one

at the site of a half marathon in Siberia in May.

Regional administrations are forming "volunteer battalions" that are promoted on state television. The business daily *Kommersant* counted at least 40 such entities in 20 regions, with officials promising volunteers monthly salaries ranging from the equivalent of \$2,150 to nearly \$5,500, plus bonuses.

The AP saw thousands of openings on job search websites for various military specialists.

The British military said this week that Russia had formed a new ground force called the 3rd Army Corps from "volunteer battalions," seeking men up to age 50 and requiring only a middle-school education, while offering "lucrative cash bonuses" once they are deployed to Ukraine.

In early August, Tabalov said he began receiving requests for legal help from reservists who have been ordered to take part in a two-month training in areas near the border with Ukraine.

The recruitment of prisoners has been going on in recent weeks

in as many as seven regions, said Vladimir Osechkin, founder of the Gulagu.net prisoner rights group, citing inmates and their relatives that his group had contacted.

It's not the first time authorities have used such a tactic, with the Soviet Union employing "prisoner battalions" during World War II.

Nor is Russia alone. Early in the war, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy promised amnesty to military veterans behind bars if they volunteered to fight, although it remains unclear if anything came out of it.

In the current circumstances, Osechkin said, it isn't the Defense Ministry that's recruiting prisoners — instead, it was Russia's shadowy private military force, the Wagner Group.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, reportedly Wagner's manager and financier, brushed aside reports he personally visited prisons to recruit convicts, in a written statement released by his representatives. Prigozhin, in fact, denied he has any ties to Wagner.

Jet recovered after Truman mishap lacked advanced traits

By ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The \$67.4 million Super Hornet that blew off the deck of a Navy carrier into the Mediterranean Sea lacked the cutting-edge technology available in the plane's latest version, according to the service.

It was a Block II, an older version of the jet that had not been updated, Capt. Tamara Lawrence, a U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet spokeswoman, said Wednesday.

Newer, or Block III, versions

carry technology upgrades that include an infrared search-and-track system useful in pinpointing stealth aircraft, better radar equipment and a precision-approach landing system.

That technology could be vulnerable to exploitation by the Chinese or Russians, experts have said.

The F/A-18E from the USS Harry S. Truman was lost July 8 in rough weather, and was recovered Aug. 3 from a depth of about 9,500 feet roughly a half-mile from the estimated point

where it entered the water.

It was found in the Ionian Sea, a portion of the Mediterranean that is south of the Adriatic Sea and bounded by Sicily, southern Italy, southern Albania and the western coast of Greece. It is being examined at Naval Air Station Sigonella's NATO pier complex in Augusta Bay, Italy, as part of an ongoing investigation and will be transported to the United States, Lawrence said.

Among the equipment search crews used was a CURV-21 remotely operated vehicle

equipped with a continuous transmission frequency modulation sonar.

The ROV was among other needed equipment flown to NAS Sigonella by Air Force C-17 Globemaster III cargo planes from Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, according to Lawrence.

The Navy is slowly phasing out the Super Hornet, which was introduced in 1999, but it plans to purchase 78 Block III versions and upgrade existing Block II models, Boeing, the plane's manufacturer, said in September.

USS George H.W. Bush deploys after 5 years

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush deployed this week for the first time in nearly five years, following intensive maintenance.

Carrier Strike Group 10 left its homeport in Newport, Va. on Wednesday, the Navy said in a statement.

The Navy did not say where the group was headed, but USNI News previously reported the George H.W. Bush is expected to relieve the USS Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group, which has been on duty in the Mediterranean since December.

“Throughout our deployment, we will continue to operate with

and reassure our allies, maintain open sea lanes for trade and increased prosperity and deter or, if necessary, destroy our adversaries,” Rear Adm. Dennis Velez, commander of CSG 10, said in the statement.

In a show of NATO strength, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered Truman to remain in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations in February as tensions rose amid Russia’s troop buildup along the borders of Ukraine and subsequent full-scale invasion.

Among other operations, the Truman has supported training and patrol flights in Eastern Europe. It has also sailed in the Mediterranean, Ionian, Adriatic and Aegean seas and participated in military exercises with

NATO allies and partners.

The George H.W. Bush CSG, which also includes Carrier Air Wing 7, has more than 6,000 sailors. The cruiser USS Leyte Gulf and destroyers USS Delbert D. Black, USS Farragut and USS Truxtun of Destroyer Squadron 26, which also recently departed their homeports, are part of the carrier strike group as well.

This is the Delbert D. Black’s first deployment, the Navy said.

The carrier’s last deployment in 2017 included service in the Arabian Gulf, where it supported missions targeting ISIS as part of Operation Inherent Resolve. It returned from that seven-month deployment in August 2017.

It completed a 2½-year dry-

dock maintenance in August 2021, according to the Navy. The maintenance period was the \$8.5 billion ship’s first time out of the water since 2006.

Last week, the destroyer USS Bulkeley sailed from Norfolk as part of a scheduled homeport shift and gradual plan to rotate four destroyers based at Naval Station Rota in Spain.

Bulkeley will join USS Arleigh Burke, USS Roosevelt and USS Paul Ignatius, the Navy said in an Aug. 4 statement.

The White House announced in June that two additional destroyers would be based at Rota but didn’t specify which ships or give a timeline for their arrival, according to a June 28 USNI News report.

N. Korea claims disputed victory over coronavirus

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — In a striking speech before thousands of North Koreans, leader Kim Jong Un’s sister said he suffered a fever while guiding the country to victory over the coronavirus. She blamed rival South Korea for the outbreak and vowed “deadly” retaliation.

Kim Yo Jong, a powerful official in charge of inter-Korean relations, glorified her brother’s leadership during the outbreak in her speech Wednesday at a national meeting where he jubilantly described the country’s widely disputed success over the virus as an “amazing miracle” in global public health.

North Korea’s statements about its outbreak are widely believed to be manipulated to help Kim Jong Un maintain absolute authority. But experts

believe the victory announcement signals his intention to move to other priorities and are concerned his sister’s remarks portend a provocation, which might include nuclear or missile tests or even border skirmishes.

The North’s official Korean Central News Agency said Thursday that Kim Jong Un declared victory over COVID-19 and ordered an easing of preventive measures just three months after the country first acknowledged an outbreak.

In her first known televised speech, his sister accused South Korea of spreading COVID-19 to North Korea’s largely unvaccinated populace, saying the initial infections were caused by “leaflets, banknotes, awful booklets” and other items flown across the border by anti-North Korean activists in the South.

US sailor on Guam takes plea deal in shooting case

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

A Navy sailor on Guam agreed to testify against a codefendant in a shooting case in exchange for prosecutors dropping charges against him, according to the U.S. island territory’s attorney general Thursday.

Eric Benjamin Salone, 28, pleaded guilty June 16 to one count of possessing a firearm without a proper ID, a third-degree felony, according to an email from Carlina Charfauros, a spokeswoman for Attorney General Leevin Taitano Camacho.

Salone agreed to testify against Nicholas Moore, 24, whose trial is scheduled to begin 9 a.m. Monday. Jury selection began Thursday in Guam Superior Court in Hagatna.

Salone’s plea is temporarily set aside. If he cooperates with the case against Moore and completes a three-year probation, the

case against him will be dismissed, Charfauros said.

Salone has been free on \$100,000 bail since March, according to court records. His case was severed from Moore’s, Charfauros said Thursday.

Salone and Moore were each charged March 24 with two counts of aggravated assault and terrorizing. Salone was also charged with possessing a firearm without the required ID and Moore with possessing an unregistered firearm. The assault and terrorizing charges came with the special allegation of use of a deadly weapon.

The Navy did not respond to requests from Stars and Stripes to identify Salone’s rank, unit or his military occupation.

The service does not comment on ongoing investigations, Joint Region Marianas spokeswoman Lt. Cmdr. Katie Koenig said Thursday.

US wholesale inflation fell for first time in 2 years

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Prices at the wholesale level fell from June to July, the first month-to-month drop in more than two years and a sign that some of the U.S. economy's inflationary pressures cooled last month.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department showed the producer price index — which measures inflation before it reaches consumers — declined 0.5% in July. It was the first monthly drop since April 2020 and was down from a sharp 1% increase from May to June.

The easing of wholesale inflation suggests consumers could get some relief from relentless inflation in the coming months. The wholesale report follows government data Wednesday that showed consumer inflation was unchanged from June to July — the first flat figure after 25 straight months of increases.

Yet economists caution that it's still too early to say that inflation is headed steadily lower.

"The July deceleration ... is a move in the right direction," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics. "But producer costs continue to rise at a rapid pace, well above target."

Wholesale food prices rose 1% from June

to July, a sign that grocery prices will likely keep rising in the coming months. The wholesale costs of eggs, beef and vegetables all jumped.

Trucking freight costs, though, fell 0.3%, evidence that some supply chain snarls are easing.

Inflation at the wholesale level still jumped 9.8% in July compared with a year earlier, suggesting inflation will remain at painful levels for months to come. That was down from a year-over-year surge of 11.3% in June — near a four-decade high — and was the smallest annual rise in eight months.

Thursday's report showed wholesale gas prices tumbled 16.7% from June to July, a sign retail prices at the pump will continue to decline this month and likely into September. Consumers are already seeing steady reductions: Gas prices fell below \$4 a gallon, on average, on Thursday for the first time in five months.

Chair Jerome Powell has said the Fed would need to see a series of declining inflation readings before it would consider pausing its rate increases. The Fed could announce a third straight three-quarter point rate hike when it next meets in late September or instead carry out a less drastic half-point hike.

Unemployment claims rise by 14,000 to 262K

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans who signed up for unemployment benefits rose last week to the highest level since November, though the U.S. job market continues to show signs of strength.

Applications for jobless aid climbed by 14,000 to 262,000 and have now risen five out of the last six weeks, the Labor Department reported Thursday.

The four-week average for claims, which smooths out weekly ups and downs, rose by 4,500 to 252,000, also the highest since November.

The number of Americans collecting traditional unemployment benefits increased by 8,000 the week that ended July 30 to 1.43 million, the highest since early April.

Unemployment applications are a proxy for layoffs and are often seen as an early indicator of where the job market is headed.

So far this year, hiring in the United States has been remarkably strong and resilient in the face of rising interest rates and weak economic growth. The Labor Department reported last week that U.S. employers added 528,000 jobs last month, more than double what forecasters had expected. The unemployment rate dipped to 3.5% in July, tying a 50-year low reached just before the coronavirus pandemic slammed the U.S. economy in early 2020.

The U.S. recovered with unexpected strength from 2020's COVID-19 recession, leaving businesses scrambling to find enough workers.

But the U.S. economy still faces challenges. Consumer prices have been surging, rising 8.5% in July from a year earlier — down slightly from June's 40-year high 9.1%. To combat inflation, the Federal Reserve has raised its benchmark short-term interest rate four times this year.

Higher borrowing costs have taken a toll. The economy contracted in the first half of the year — one rule of thumb for the onset of a recession. But the strength of the job market is inconsistent with an economic downturn.

"Demand for labor remains quite strong," economists Thomas Simons and Aneta Markowska of Jefferies wrote Thursday. "The modest pickup in claims suggests that turnover may be increasing in weaker firms that are struggling with slowing growth."

Herrera Beutler third Republican impeacher to lose primary election

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler has become the third congressperson who voted to impeach former President Donald Trump to be ousted in a primary.

Herrera Beutler fell to Trump-backed Joe Kent, a former Green Beret, in the 3rd Congressional District contest. The district is in southwest Washington state, across the border from Portland, Ore. Kent will face Democrat Marie Gluesenkamp Perez in November. She had already advanced to the general election since she was the top vote-getter after the Aug. 2 primary, with 31% of the vote.

Herrera Beutler, who was first elected to the U.S. House in 2010, led Kent by about 4,700 votes on election night but

her lead shrunk throughout last week, and updated returns Wednesday night put Kent — who was in the No. 2 spot since Monday night — ahead by 1,050 votes.

Kent finished with 22.8% of the vote, and Herrera Beutler was in third place with 22.3% of the vote.

Herrera Beutler conceded the race in an email Tuesday night, saying that "since I was first elected to this seat, I have done my very best to serve my home region and our country."

In a statement Wednesday, Kent thanked the other Republican candidates, saying all of the "campaigns fought hard because we all care deeply about this district and this country."

Russia confirms prisoner swap talks with US

The Washington Post

RIGA, Latvia — Russia on Thursday confirmed for the first time that negotiations between Washington and Moscow on a prisoner exchange were underway, after the United States proposed a deal to release WNBA star Whitney Griner and another American prisoner Paul Whelan.

The Russian Foreign Ministry confirmed negotiations were underway via a channel set up by President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin when they met in Geneva in June last year.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ivan Nechayev said Thursday that negotiations about an exchange began after Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov confirmed last week that Russia was willing to talk.

“Instructions were given to authorized structures to carry out negotiations,” Nechayev said. “They are being conducted by

competent authorities,” he told journalists in Moscow Thursday, state media reported.

The Biden administration has been under massive pressure to secure Griner’s release after her arrest at Moscow’s Sheremetyevo International Airport in February. She was carrying two vape cartridges with cannabis oil, containing less than a gram of the substance, banned in Russia.

Griner’s plea to the court for leniency fell on deaf ears, and she was sentenced to nine years in prison in a Russian court last Thursday. Her legal team has announced plans to appeal.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced last month that officials had made a “substantial” offer for a deal to secure the release of Griner and Whelan but has not confirmed media reports that Washington offered to swap Russian arms trafficker Viktor Bout, who is serving a 25-year sen-

tence in the U.S.

After Lavrov’s comments, Blinken said after Russia’s indication that “they are prepared to engage through channels we’ve established to do just that ... we’ll be pursuing that.” Biden said Friday that “I’m hopeful. We’re working hard.”

The State Department has said both Griner and Whelan were wrongfully detained. Biden spoke by phone to the families of Griner and Whelan last month to assure them that his administration was doing everything it could to see them freed.

Former Marine Whelan, 52, a security consultant arrested in 2018 and convicted of spying in 2020, is serving a 16-year jail sentence. He has said he was framed. He was left behind when the U.S. exchanged another former Marine, Trevor Reed, for convicted Russian drug trafficker Konstantin Yaroshenko in April.

Cancellation of Atlanta festival sparks fight over guns

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Tens of thousands of Music Midtown festivalgoers are no longer going to descend on Atlanta’s massive Piedmont Park next month to cheer on hip-hop star Future or watch beloved rock band My Chemical Romance take the stage.

In fact, some people are convinced Atlanta — center of the nation’s hip-hop music scene — will lose more music festivals and performances on public land as organizers and artists learn that state law makes it nearly impossible for them to stop people from carrying guns among the alcohol-fueled crowds.

That prospect has ignited a new fight over gun rights in Georgia that is roiling the governor’s race, casting a shadow over Atlanta’s vaunted music scene and adding to tension between the city and state.

Live Nation has refused to say why it recently called off September’s Music Midtown, a longtime fixture for pop music lovers.

But news outlets, citing anonymous sources, ascribed last week’s announcement to a 2019 Georgia Supreme Court decision that outlined limits on the ability of private companies to ban guns on public property. The ruling stemmed from a 2014 state law that ex-

panded the locations where guns were allowed.

Democrats, led by Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, pounced on the news, casting the cancellation as an example of the sort of economic fallout the state would experience from Republican Gov. Brian Kemp’s “extreme gun agenda.” Though the gun law cited in reports about Music Midtown was enacted under Kemp’s Republican predecessor, Kemp was a key backer of a new state law this year that eliminated the need for a license — and with it, a background check — to carry a handgun in public.

4 al-Shabab militants killed after series of US airstrikes

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Four al-Shabab terrorists who recently attacked Somali forces were killed Wednesday after a series of American airstrikes, U.S. Africa Command announced Wednesday.

U.S. forces, in coordination with the Somali government, launched three airstrikes against the terrorists who attacked the Somali troops Tuesday near Beledweyne, Somalia, AFRICOM said.

“The command’s initial assessment is that the strikes killed four al-Shabab terrorists and that no civilians were injured or killed,” AFRICOM said. “U.S. forces are

authorized to conduct strikes in defense of designated partner forces.”

The announcement did not include further detail about the al-Shabab attack.

Al-Shabab is the Somali-based militant wing of the Somali Council of Islamic Courts that controlled the southernmost part of the country in 2006, according to the U.S. Director of National Intelligence. Though the main group was defeated in 2007, al-Shabab has continued its violent insurgency.

“The federal government of Somalia and U.S. Africa Command take great measures to prevent civilian casualties,” AFRICOM said. “These efforts contrast with the indis-

criminate attacks that al-Shabab regularly conducts against the civilian population.”

The airstrikes came about two months after U.S. special operations troops returned to Somalia. Former President Donald Trump had decided to pull roughly 700 U.S. service members from the country during the last days of his administration.

President Joe Biden reversed Trump’s decision based on a request from Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin out of “concern for the safety of our troops who have incurred additional risk by deploying in and out of Somalia on an episodic basis,” then-Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said at the time.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Returnees from summer hot spot brawl on ferry

RI PROVIDENCE — Rhode Islanders who flocked to a summer hot spot on Monday for the Victory Day holiday got into brawls at a resort and on a ferry ride home, leading to eight arrests.

The fighting started at a beach resort on Block Island that was hosting a reggae festival. It continued on a ferry that was added to the schedule due to overcrowding on the island.

Police arrested seven people, who are all from Rhode Island, ranging in age from 20 to 37. Five were charged with disorderly conduct, one was charged with obstructing an officer and one faces a weapons charge. There was a disturbance at Ballard's Beach Resort before the ferry brawl and one person was arrested there for fighting, police said.

The state is the only one in the nation that still observes the Victory Day holiday, which commemorates Japan's surrender ending World War II.

Police: Exec had weapons in hospital office closet

NJ SECAUCUS — The marketing director of a northern New Jersey hospital is facing weapons charges after a bomb threat yielded what police said was a cache of weapons in the hospital.

According to police in Secaucus, the bomb threat — which later was determined to be bogus — was called in to Hudson Regional Hospital on July 18. During a search, bomb detection dogs led investigators to an unlocked office closet containing dozens of firearms. Among

the weapons were 11 handguns and 27 rifles or shotguns, according to police. The closet also contained a .45 caliber semi-automatic rifle with a high-capacity magazine that was determined to be an assault rifle, and a 14-round high-capacity handgun magazine.

On Sunday, police arrested Reuven Alonlayoff, 46, and charged the Elmwood Park resident with possession of an assault rifle and possession of two high-capacity magazines. Alonlayoff wasn't at the hospital the day the guns were discovered, according to police.

Man filming sunrise killed when sand dune collapses

FL HUTCHINSON ISLAND — A 35-year-old Florida man who was recording the sunrise over the Atlantic Ocean died when a sand dune collapsed on top of him, sheriff's officials said.

A beachgoer saw a portion of the man's body protruding from the sand on Hutchinson Island early Monday and called for help, the Martin County Sheriff's Office said in a Facebook post. The man was apparently resting beneath the dune while recording the sunrise when the hill of sand collapsed, detectives said.

Detectives don't suspect foul play, but they are awaiting results of toxicology tests before deeming it to be a "tragic accident," the post said.

Paramedic, 1 other killed when car hits crash scene

SC FLORENCE — A paramedic and a motorcyclist hurt in the original wreck were killed as a car drove into the scene of police, firefighters

and others responding to the crash on a South Carolina highway Tuesday night, authorities said.

Four people in all were struck, including a state trooper and another police officer, Florence County Sheriff T.J. Joye said.

The first responders were helping after two motorcyclists were severely injured in a crash around 9 p.m. on state Highway 51 near Florence, the sheriff said. The driver who hit the people was taken to the hospital, Joye told WPDE-TV.

Cleanup underway after oil tank platform collapse

LA HOUMA — An oil spill cleanup is underway at a site where an oil tank platform collapsed in a Louisiana bay, the Coast Guard said.

The spill of crude oil occurred at Hilcorp's Caillou Island facility in Terrebonne Bay, according to a news release emailed late Monday.

Hilcorp estimates that less than 14,000 gallons spilled, and no wildlife had been affected, the statement said. The cause is being investigated.

Beaned Little Leaguer consoles upset pitcher

TX WACO — A Little League batter rose from a beaning to console the upset pitcher in a dramatic scene at a Little League regional tournament game Tuesday in Waco, Texas.

The incident happened during a Little League Southwest Regional Playoff final. Right-hander Kaiden Shelton of Pearland, Texas, was facing batter Isaiah Jarvis of Tulsa, Okla., when an 0-2 pitch got away from him and slammed into Jarvis'

helmet. Jarvis fell to the ground clutching his head as his concerned coaches ran to his aid.

After a few moments, Jarvis' head cleared enough for him to walk unaided to first base. Meantime, Shelton stood on the mound staring at the ground in tears over what happened.

After a moment, Jarvis walked to the mound and put his arms around Shelton, telling him, "Hey, you're doing great. Let's go." Shelton's teammates and coach gathered around the pair to join in consoling the young righty.

The gesture drew a standing ovation. Pearland went on to beat Tulsa 9-4 and advance to the Little League World Series.

Eatery to pay workers after violating labor laws

NY NEW YORK — Chipotle Mexican Grill will pay \$20 million to current and former workers at its New York City restaurants for violating labor laws, Mayor Eric Adams announced Tuesday.

According to investigators, Chipotle's violations of the city's Fair Workweek law included failing to post work schedules 14 days in advance, pay a premium for schedule changes and offer available shifts to current employees before hiring new ones.

The settlement between the city and the California-based fast-food chain covers about 13,000 employees who worked at the chain's New York City outlets between 2017 and this year. Under the agreement, any hourly New York City Chipotle worker is eligible to receive \$50 for each week worked between Nov. 26, 2017, and April 30, 2022.

— From wire reports

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Foes will keep eye on Dallas' Parsons

Associated Press

Micah Parsons might not lobby for playing time in the preseason this month the way the Dallas linebacker did last year in one of the “Hard Knocks” highlights for the Dallas Cowboys.

The reigning NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year wants to be clear. Parsons still wants to play in preseason games, even though there's a decent chance he won't because of how the Cowboys set up their training camp schedule in California.

“I don't care what game it is, I'm going to try to win,” Parsons said. “If you don't have that competitiveness, I wouldn't want to play with you. I even get mad at my sister when we play Scrabble.”

The question is no longer whether Parsons is playing. That was answered in a 13-sack season that was among the best for a rookie at his position in NFL history. The question now is where the first-round pick from a year

ago will play.

After the addition of free agent linebacker Anthony Barr a week into camp, there's even more talk of “hand in the ground” Parsons — meaning the three-point stance of an outside pass rusher.

The same conversation started early last season, after defensive end DeMarcus Lawrence broke his foot in practice the week after the opener.

By then, Parsons had already shown versatility with his knack for getting to quarterbacks. He played almost exclusively on the line in just his second game — a victory at the Los Angeles Chargers that started a six-game winning streak.

Now he has something of a traveling companion on work days. Linebackers coach Scott McCurley goes with Parsons when he meets with the defensive line group.

“It's something the more you can keep him involved, the better he is in that setting,”

McCurley said. “He's a natural competitor by heart. I think the meeting room is kind of the same way, in staying involved in everything that's going on.”

Ask Dan Quinn about Parsons spending time in both meeting rooms, and the defensive coordinator doesn't need long to remember that his young star believes there isn't much he can't do.

“That's a good question because he does spend time in different rooms and different spots, to go from D-line, LB some,” Quinn said, trying to keep a straight face. “I'm sure you probably heard he's working with the running backs ... wide receivers, kicking.”

Quinn finally cracked a smile, but there was a serious side to the answer.

“What's unique about Micah is the way we can align him in different spots where he's counted as a down guy, an off-the-ball guy, so I think that's important to say, ‘Where's the

alignment in how we would deploy him from there?’” Quinn said. “Because certainly they value his rush ability and his speed, but we want to make sure we're not just putting him into one spot.”

Parsons' value as a pass rusher probably went up when defensive end Randy Gregory switched to Denver in free agency after agreeing to a contract to return to the Cowboys. The signing of Barr was the next step — an important piece for depth at the position Parsons vacates when he joins the defensive front.

Still, the conversation appears to stop short of Parsons becoming a full-time pass rusher.

“I hate to limit myself, because of how much I can do in coverage and man on man,” Parsons said. “I think that's what adds the versatility, that's what adds the matchup nightmare. So I'm going to keep floating around and make these people try to find me.”

Chiefs running back job surprisingly up for grabs

Associated Press

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. — Clyde Edwards-Helaire and Isiah Pacheco were chosen by the Kansas City Chiefs on opposite ends of the draft spectrum, one of them a first-round pick with the accompanying expectations and the other a seventh-round longshot.

Midway through training camp, they might as well have been picked one after the other.

That's because Edwards-Helaire, the incumbent-if-injury-prone starter, and Pacheco, the unheralded rookie, have swapped first-team reps on a near-daily basis.

And while veterans Jerick McKinnon and Ronald Jones II are fighting for roster spots of their own, the competition be-

tween Edwards-Helaire and Pacheco has become must-watch stuff for fans at camp.

“I'm curious to see those guys compete in games,” Chiefs coach Andy Reid admitted. “We know a couple of (the running backs) because they've been here and we're learning about the others. But it looks like a good group.”

The first chance to see them in games comes Saturday, when the Chiefs visit Chicago for their preseason opener.

Edwards-Helaire, the 32nd overall pick in the 2020 draft, is the known quantity in Kansas City, where he has started 23 games over his first two seasons. He's averaged nearly 4½ yards per carry, caught 55 passes and has proven that despite

his small, 5-foot-8 stature that he can protect Patrick Mahomes from would-be blitzers.

His biggest problem, though, has been that he's only played 23 regular-season games, thanks to a litany of injuries that put him on the sideline nearly as much as on the field. And along with missing seven games last season, Edwards-Helaire also missed the Chiefs' wild-card game before serving as a backup to McKinnon in the divisional round and AFC title game.

“Clyde has done a heck of a job — a heck of a job — staying healthy this entire offseason,” said Chiefs offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy, who spent nine seasons playing running back in the NFL. “At the end of the day we've just got to make

sure that we're emphasizing putting him in position to have an opportunity to make plays.”

What could give Edwards-Helaire an advantage in the race for the No. 1 job? His ability to catch the ball out of the backfield — “I am a thousand-and-ten percent confident in my hands,” he said — and his experience in Reid's offense.

The playbook is thick. The terminology is complicated. The entire system takes time to learn.

Pacheco seems to be picking it up in a hurry.

He was the 251st overall pick in April's draft, which means only 10 players were selected after him, and his résumé at Rutgers hardly made him a hot prospect.

Riley rebuilding USC with veteran arrivals

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — When Brett Neilon looks around Southern California's locker room, the Trojans' sixth-year center sees a few teammates who were with him all the way from the heights of a Pac-12 title to the depths of this storied football program's worst season in 30 years.

Neilon also sees the nation's top receiver at Pitt in 2021, Oklahoma's former freshman quarterback sensation, an ex-Alabama linebacker and a few dozen other guys he just recently met, all wearing new cardinal jerseys and preparing to restore the Trojans to glory this fall.

They aren't quite an expansion team, but college football also hasn't really seen anything quite like these Trojans. From his vantage point between two eras of USC football, Neilon loves the view.

"It kind of feels like a whole new team," Neilon said.

"There's a lot of excitement. There's some of the best players in college football in there. It's all a melting pot for a really fun, exciting season."

Most of the Trojans share Neilon's mix of uncertainty overwhelmed by excitement about what Lincoln Riley is attempting in his first season at USC.

Rebuilding after the Trojans' worst season in 30 years, Riley dug deep into the newly flush transfer portal to add 24 veterans from across the country. Many are elite skill-position players — including Biletnikoff Award winner Jordan Addison, ex-Oklahoma receiver Mario Williams, and two prolific running backs and two receivers from other Pac-12 schools.

The centerpiece of the group is Caleb Williams, who passed for 1,912 yards and 21 touchdowns at Oklahoma last year. The quarterback said he rejoined Riley "to be a part of something historic. I mean, being

a part of USC is already historic, but trying to get USC back to what it was is also historic."

This massive influx is joining a USC roster with 71 returning players from last season's 4-8 team, but only 37 lettermen and just eight starters. Add in at least a dozen true freshmen, and it's clear Riley's staff has amassed a remarkable amount of new talent — and given itself a daunting task to mold it into a cohesive team capable of immediately contending for a Pac-12 title.

"This probably won't be the way we build our roster in the future," Riley said. "Because of the circumstances we were in when we came here, and because of the opportunities afforded to us, we felt that getting players in the transfer portal was the best way to get us to where we want to be. In the future, I think we will look more traditional. For now, I'm excited about this group."

USC's unusual offseason was possible because college football is in unprecedented times amid the collision of four factors: a long-awaited regime change at an attractive, underrating football powerhouse; the still-new transfer freedom allowing college athletes to play wherever they please; the opportunity to play for one of the sport's top coaches without waiting in line behind his hand-picked recruits; and the chance to hitch a ride on the rising rocket of NIL earnings at schools with USC's market size and cachet.

"USC is a blue blood, simple as that," Caleb Williams said. "Teams and organizations and things like that, they have rough moments, and that's all USC has had. And we're here trying to turn that around, because I know that Shane's not a loser. I know that I'm not a loser. These guys around us want to win. They have that in them."

Utah quarterback Rising ready to show off skills

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Unlike last season, Cam Rising isn't facing a battle to become Utah's starting quarterback heading into a new year.

Rising cemented his spot atop the depth chart when he led the Utes to their first Pac-12 championship and first Rose Bowl berth a season ago. Now, he's eager to show off all his skills.

"There's no weakness in Cam Rising right now," coach Kyle Whittingham. "He's doing everything right coming off an outstanding year."

One area where Rising has made strides is his arm strength. Rising did not test his surgically repaired shoulder with deep balls much last season. He had five 200-yard games and one 300-yard game as a passer. This season could

be a much different story.

He has been fearless about taking shots down the field in camp and pushing his receivers to make plays on the outside.

"(My arm) feels like it's back," Rising said. "Last year, didn't feel all the way getting comfortable throwing the deep ball. But this year, it definitely feels more comfortable getting the ball downfield and pushing it."

Rising's teammates are believers. His accuracy on deeper routes has left them impressed.

"He's slinging it a little faster and a little harder," tight end Dalton Kincaid said. "I can definitely tell the arm strength's there and there's a lot of confidence in it."

Becoming a threat with the deep ball will simply add a new wrinkle to Rising's skillset,

which routinely flummoxes defenses.

He kept opposing teams off balance with his running ability last season, totaling 499 yards while averaging 6.7 yards per carry. Rising even chipped in on special teams as an emergency punter. He averaged 32.7 yards on three punts last season.

Still, Rising said he entered Utah's fall camp with the same determination to prove himself that he's shown since joining the program as a transfer from Texas.

"I still got to attack it and prove I'm the best guy for the job each and every day," Rising said.

Rising won the confidence of his teammates and coaches long before he replaced Charlie Brewer halfway through a Week 3 loss to San Diego State

last season. The junior quickly showed what inspired that confidence in the first place.

He threw for 2,493 yards and 20 touchdowns while tossing only five interceptions to help fuel Utah's successful championship run. Rising completed 63.8% of his pass attempts.

Among Pac-12 quarterbacks, he ranked third in passing yards per game (214.1), third in passing efficiency (145.74), and second in passing yards per completion (12.76) in conference games. At season's end, Rising earned All-Pac-12 first-team honors.

Whittingham attributes Rising's emergence to his work ethic. The coach described him as one of the hardest workers on the team and said it has impacted every facet of his game.

"I just keep trying to improve," Rising said.

Santana's HR rallies Mariners past Yanks

Associated Press

SEATTLE — In a clubhouse with little experience of being in a playoff chase, Carlos Santana is the old guy that can be turned to for advice and guidance.

And sometimes he comes up with a clutch hit or two as a reminder he's still a pretty good player.

Santana snapped an 0-for-17 slump with a go-ahead two-run homer during Seattle's three-run seventh inning, and the Mariners rallied to beat the slumping New York Yankees 4-3 on Wednesday.

"I trust Carlos in a number of different areas, certainly on the field, the pedigree and the experience level," Seattle manager Scott Servais said. "I also trust him a lot in the clubhouse."

Seattle took two of three from New York for the second straight week to win the season series 4-2. With the Yankees leading the AL East and Seattle in the first AL wild card spot, the teams could meet again in the playoffs.

Aaron Judge hit his major league-leading 45th homer of the season for the Yankees, who

have lost eight of 10.

"I think they're really good. They can pitch, obviously have some good starters, but their bullpen is about as good a bullpen as we faced," New York manager Aaron Boone said of Seattle. "They can mix and make, they got right and left in their lineup. Obviously they're going to get (Julio) Rodriguez back. That team certainly feels for real."

Seattle has not lost a series to a team other than AL West-leading Houston since mid-June. Seattle is 10-10 since the All-Star break, a challenging stretch that included 13 games against Houston and New York.

Brewers 4, Rays 3: Rowdy Tellez hit a tying homer in the ninth inning and made a key defensive play in the 10th, setting up Willy Adames' game-ending RBI single that gave host Milwaukee the win over Tampa Bay.

Dodgers 8, Twins 5: Chris Taylor hit the go-ahead home run in the sixth inning, Joey Gallo added a three-run shot in the seventh and host Los Angeles won its 10th straight.

Mets 10, Reds 2: Francisco Lindor scored three runs, tying a franchise record by crossing the plate in 13 consecutive games, and host New York breezed past Cincinnati for its sixth straight win.

Padres 13, Giants 7: Brandon Drury hit a go-ahead, three-run home run in the sixth and Austin Nola's two-run homer capped a seven-run rally — all with two outs — that carried host San Diego past San Francisco.

Angels 5, Athletics 4: Magneuris Sierra hit an RBI single in the 10th inning, then doubled home the go-ahead run in the 12th that lifted visiting Los Angeles to a three-game sweep of Oakland.

Phillies 4, Marlins 3: J.T. Realmuto hit an RBI single that capped a three-run rally in the eighth inning off NL ERA leader Sandy Alcantara, and host Philadelphia got its seventh straight win.

Guardians 3, Tigers 2: Steven Kwan hit a leadoff triple and scored to get visiting Cleveland off to a solid start in a victory over Detroit.

Cubs 4, Nationals 2: Nico

Hoerner homered to ignite a four-run rally in the seventh inning that sent host Chicago past Washington.

Braves 8, Red Sox 4: Top prospect Vaughn Grissom homered onto Lansdowne Street in his major league debut, and Marcell Ozuna hit a three-run homer to lead visiting Atlanta past Boston.

Royals 8, White Sox 3: MJ Melendez hit a tiebreaking homer in the seventh inning to send host Kansas City past Chicago.

Rangers 8, Astros 4 (10): Leody Taveras drove in a career-high five runs, including a bases-clearing double as part of a five-run 10th inning to lead visiting Texas.

Cardinals 9, Rockies 5: Albert Pujols and Nolan Arenado homered and combined for seven hits, and Jose Quintana made his second strong start for visiting St. Louis.

Pirates 6, Diamondbacks 4: Rodolfo Castro had two hits to spark the offense one night after a faux pas where his smartphone fell out of his pocket sliding into third base, and visiting Pittsburgh beat Arizona.

Serena loses first match since saying she'll step away

Associated Press

TORONTO — Serena Williams wore her game face when she stepped out into the stadium for her first match since telling the world she is ready to leave professional tennis.

Greeted by a standing ovation, the 23-time Grand Slam champion didn't smile. She didn't wave. She took a sip from a plastic bottle as she walked in. Some folks in the crowd captured the moment with the cameras on their cellphones. Others held aloft handwritten signs — oh, so many signs — with messages such as "Queen" or "Thank you".

No one knows exactly how many more matches Williams

will play before she puts her rackets away for good, and the 40-year-old American exited the National Bank Open on Wednesday night with a 6-2, 6-4 loss to Belinda Bencic.

While there were some familiar fist pumps and yells of "Come on!" during competition, it was only afterward that Williams really allowed her feelings to show, her voice shaking and her eyes welling during an on-court interview when Bencic ceded the spotlight.

"A lot of emotions, obviously," Williams told spectators who offered her encouragement throughout the clear, 75-degree evening.

The second-round match at

the hard-court tuneup for the U.S. Open came a day after she announced "the countdown has begun" on her playing career, saying she wants to have another child and pursue business interests.

She did not state precisely what her last event will be, but did make it sound as if her final farewell will come at the U.S. Open, which begins Aug. 29 in New York. Williams has won the singles title at Flushing Meadows a half-dozen times — first in 1999; most recently in 2014 — to go along with seven championships apiece at Wimbledon and the Australian Open, plus three at the French Open.

"It's been a pretty interesting 24 hours," Williams said after Wednesday's match.

"I'm terrible at goodbyes," she added, her hand on her chest, "but goodbye, Toronto!"

Next up on her schedule is the Western & Southern Open in Cincinnati next week, another event that serves as preparation for the year's last Grand Slam tournament.

Williams, a three-time champion in Canada, started this match, fittingly enough, with an ace. She delivered another later in that game, too, showing off the superb serve that helped her to so many match victories, tournament titles and weeks at No. 1 in the rankings.