

Pilot error blamed in fatal Osprey crash

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Pilot error was the cause of an Osprey aircraft crash in Norway in March that killed four Marines, the service said in a statement.

The crash happened in the vicinity of Bodo, Norway, where thousands of troops were assembled for Exercise Cold Response.

The crew departed on an approved flight plan in clear conditions to the south of Bodo as their mission got underway, but the aircraft deviated from the preplanned route, the Corps' investigation of the crash found.

The Osprey then entered the Gratadalen Valley, where it went down.

The investigation concluded that the crash resulted from a series of faulty maneuvers conducted at a low altitude, the Marine Corps' 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing

said in the statement Monday.

Analysis of the recovered aircraft data showed that while in the valley, the Osprey made a left turn at a 68-degree angle of bank, followed by an overcorrected right turn of more than 80 degrees, the Marines said.

Operating standards for the MV-22B Osprey for such a maneuver specify a limit of 60 degrees.

Marine Corps investigators examined and dismissed other potential contributing factors, such as weather and environmental conditions, adherence to predeployment training requirements and possible inexperience in mountainous environments.

The investigation could not determine which crew member was piloting the Osprey. The four Marines killed were Capt. Matthew Tomkiewicz, the aircraft com-

mander; Capt. Ross Reynolds, the co-pilot; Gunnery Sgt. James Speedy, the aerial observer; and Cpl. Jacob Moore, the crew chief.

"Their loss continues to be felt across the Marine Corps, and our condolences remain with the family and friends of the fallen," the Corps said in a statement.

Five Marines were also killed in June when their Osprey crashed in California during training.

The hybrid Osprey, which takes off like a helicopter and can fly like a plane, has attracted criticism over safety concerns ever since it began replacing the CH-46 helicopter in the 2000s.

Navy and Marine Corps officials, however, have repeatedly stated that the Osprey is fit to fly. The aircraft also played a key role for the Corps during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

US, South Korea mum on details ahead of exercise

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The United States and South Korea kicked off a four-day preliminary drill Tuesday in preparation for their largest military exercise in five years.

The preliminary drill, which consists of training simulations, ends Friday and is the precursor to Ulchi Freedom Shield, the first large-scale command-post exercise between the U.S. and South Korea since 2017, according to a Ministry of Defense news release.

Ulchi Freedom Shield, named after Eulji Mundeok, a seventh century Korean general, is scheduled to start Monday and end Sept. 1. The exercise was known as Ulchi Freedom Guardian between 2008 to 2018 and as Combined Command Post Training from 2019 to 2021.

Ulchi Freedom Shield is one of two major exercises traditionally conducted annually by the U.S. and South Korea. Exercise Freedom Shield is scheduled for early next year.

Exact troop numbers and equipment used for the upcoming exercise have not been publicly released by U.S. Forces Korea or the Ministry of Defense. During Ulchi Freedom Guardian in 2017, about 50,000 South Korean

and 17,500 U.S. service members were used for the air, land and sea drills.

The military will take precautions to combat the spread of COVID-19, Defense Ministry officials said at a news briefing on Thursday. All participants are required to test negative on a PCR test prior to the start date and a self-test two to three times a week during the exercise.

USFK spokesman Wesley Hayes Thursday said he could not comment on upcoming training as a matter of policy but added that "protection of the force remains our number one priority."

The two annual exercises were downgraded to computer simulations in 2018 as then-Presidents Donald Trump and Moon Jae-in of South Korea negotiated with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un for the denuclearization of his country.

The North's propagandist outlets frequently bristle at the U.S.-South Korea military exercises and claim they are a rehearsal for an invasion.

Planning for the large-scale military drills resumed after the collapse of the Trump-Kim summit at Hanoi, Vietnam, in 2019 and the inauguration of South Korean President Yoon Seok-yeol in May. Following his first meeting with President Joe Biden in July, Yoon, a mem-

ber of the conservative People Power Party, said the two leaders would "step up" their joint military training.

The U.S. and South Korea characterize the drills as defensive exercises meant to reinforce their alliance in light of North Korea's provocations.

"We could say that there is a big meaning in this joint exercise — that South Korea and the U.S. are rebuilding the alliance between them and establishing a firm combined defense posture by normalizing the [South Korean-U.S.] joint drills and field training exercises," the Defense Ministry said in a news release Tuesday.

Ulchi Freedom Shield comes roughly two months after North Korea last conducted a missile test. Pyongyang, which continues to accuse Washington and Seoul of destabilizing the region, is also believed to be preparing for a nuclear test, according to U.S. and South Korean officials.

State Department spokesman Ned Price in a news briefing Monday told reporters that loosening existing sanctions against North Korea "is a complete hypothetical at this point because [North Korea] has heretofore not demonstrated any indication that they are interested in diplomacy or dialogue."

Ejection seats checked, USAF F-35As back

By **KYLE ALVAREZ**
Stars and Stripes

All of the Air Force's F-35A Lightning IIs have returned to service, roughly three weeks after concerns over faulty ejection seats grounded most of them, the service said.

Air Combat Command made the shutdown decision in late July amid similar moves by other services in response to problems with cartridge-actuated devices in the ejection seats. A CAD is an explosive component used to launch the seat out of the cockpit

in cases of emergency.

There was "little to no impact" on F-35 operations during the shutdown, Alexi Worley, an Air Combat Command spokeswoman, told Stars and Stripes on Tuesday.

The Air Force inspected 706 cartridges, which came from 349 F-35s as well as additional supply, Worley said Monday, according to Air Force Times. Four cartridges were found to be suspect and replaced, she said.

The first military to ground planes over the ejection seat is-

sue was Britain's. On July 22, the Royal Air Force halted flights involving Red Arrows and Typhoon fighter jets, U.K. news agencies reported.

The shutdown for the United States began July 27, when the Navy and the Marine Corps started grounding several planes that use U.K. ejection seats manufactured by the British company Martin-Baker.

The 19th Air Force's Air Education and Training command followed suit shortly thereafter, grounding nearly 300 of its train-

ing planes, which also use Martin-Baker's CADs in their ejection seats. The command has since returned to flying the planes following inspections.

Steve Roberts, Martin-Baker's head of business development, told news website The Aviationist last month that an anomaly had been discovered in an F-35 cartridge at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, in April. It was traced back to a "gap in the manufacturing process, which was addressed and changed," Roberts told The Aviationist.

In Hawaii, Navy shoots down short-range missile in exercise

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Navy and its Pacific allies recently demonstrated their ability to use the Aegis Combat System to down ballistic missiles of the type tested by North Korea this year.

The Navy for the first time in the Hawaii-based Pacific Dragon exercise used a Standard Missile 3 Block IA from an Aegis-equipped destroyer to shoot down a short-range ballistic missile. North Korea tested at least 13 short-range missiles in January, May and June.

The Aegis trial took place during the weeklong missile-defense exercise in Hawaii that concluded Sunday, the Navy said in a news release the next day. Japan, South Korea, Australia and Canada also employ the Aegis Weapon System and took part in Pacific Dragon. The exercise was held at Pacific Missile Range Facility Barking Sands on Kauai and off the island's coast.

The Navy's Aegis Weapon System can search for, track and destroy more than 100 targets.

The United States, Japan and South Korea have all expressed

concerns about North Korea's record 17 rounds of tests — more than 30 missiles — this year, and have maintained a high level of military cooperation throughout the summer. The nations met for a trilateral ministerial meeting in Singapore in June, and in July they were among the 26 countries participating in the monthlong Rim of the Pacific exercise in Hawaii.

The Kauai exercise underscores the shared goals among the three, the Defense Department said in a news release Monday.

"[T]his missile warning and ballistic missile search and tracking exercise demonstrated the commitment of the U.S., [South Korea] and Japan to furthering trilateral cooperation to respond to [North Korean] challenges, protecting shared security and prosperity, and bolstering the rules-based international order," the release said.

North Korea has stepped up its pace of test firing missiles in the past year as it seeks to develop intermediate- to long-range ballistic missiles capable of reaching Guam, Hawaii and the U.S. West Coast.

US flies paratroopers from 3 nations at Garuda Shield

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

PALENMBANG, Indonesia — U.S. airlifters from Japan for the first time dropped airborne troops of three armies into drop zones during an exercise this month in Indonesia.

Five C-130J Super Hercules and an MC-130J Commando II flew missions in support of regular Army and Special Forces troops from the United States, Indonesia and Japan during Super Garuda Shield.

The largest installment yet of an exercise held annually for 16 years involved 2,000 U.S. and 2,000 Indonesian troops and a handful from other nations and ran from Aug. 1 until Sunday.

Four of the C-130Js, from Yokota Air Base's 36th Airlift Squadron, were involved in an airborne operation at the start of the drills, the squadron chief of tactics, Capt. Zebulon Kimball, 30, of Denver, said Tuesday after returning to Japan.

The planes collected 200 paratroopers from the U.S. Army, Japan Ground Self-Defense Force and Indonesian army on Guam and flew them to Borneo to stage

for the Aug. 3 mission, Kimball told Stars and Stripes by phone.

The paratroopers, including members of the Army's 11th Infantry Division (Airborne), jumped into Baturaja Training Area on the island of Sumatra. The training area is covered in dense jungle inhabited by snakes and tigers. The paratroopers landed in a designated drop zone, however, Kimball said.

U.S. Army Pacific commander Gen. Charles Flynn observed the jump from the ground, according to an Aug. 3 Army news release.

"It's the first time I've been involved in a jump with troops from three countries," Kimball said.

The 36th Airlift Squadron works regularly with U.S. and Japanese troops but rarely interacts with Indonesian counterparts, he said.

The Indonesians approached the airborne mission with "enthusiastic aggression," Kimball said.

"Garuda Shield was an excellent opportunity for us to get down and dirty and work together," Kimball said.

Four of the Yokota C-130Js returned after the jump; the fifth stayed in Indonesia, he said.

Cheney braces for outcome in Wyo. House race

Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. — Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, a leader in the Republican resistance to former President Donald Trump, is fighting to save her seat in the U.S. House on Tuesday as voters weigh in on the direction of the GOP.

Cheney's team is bracing for a loss against a Trump-backed challenger in the state in which he won by the largest of margins during the 2020 campaign.

Win or lose, the 56-year-old daughter of a vice president is vowing to remain in national politics as she contemplates a 2024 presidential bid. But in the short term, Cheney is facing a

dire threat from Republican opponent Harriet Hageman, a Cheyenne ranching industry attorney who has harnessed the full fury of the Trump movement in her bid to expel Cheney from the House.

"I'm still hopeful that the polling numbers are wrong," said Landon Brown, a Wyoming state representative and vocal Cheney ally. "It'll be a crying shame really if she does lose. It shows just how much of a stranglehold that Donald Trump has on the Republican Party."

Tuesday's contests in Wyoming and Alaska offer one of the final tests for Trump and his

brand of hard-line politics ahead of the November general election. So far, the former president has largely dominated the fight to shape the GOP in his image, having helped install loyalists in key general election matchups from Arizona to Georgia to Pennsylvania.

In Alaska, a recent change to state election law gives a periodic Trump critic, U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, an opportunity to survive the former president's wrath, even after she voted to convict him in his second impeachment trial.

The top four primary Senate candidates in Alaska, regardless of party, will advance to the

November general election, where voters will rank them in order of preference.

In all, seven Republican senators and 10 Republican House members joined every Democrat in supporting Trump's impeachment in the days after his supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol as Congress tried to certify President Joe Biden's victory.

Just two of those 10 House members have won their GOP primaries this year. The rest have lost or declined to seek reelection. Cheney would be just the third to return to Congress if she defies expectations Tuesday.

Explosions, fires hit 2nd military depot in Crimea

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Massive explosions and fires hit a military depot in Russia-annexed Crimea on Tuesday, forcing the evacuation of more than 3,000 people, the second time in recent days that the Ukraine war's focus has turned to the peninsula.

Russia blamed the blasts at an ammunition storage facility in Mayskoye on an "act of sabotage" without naming the perpetrators. As with last week's explosions, they led to speculation that Ukraine may be behind the attack on the peninsula, which Russia has controlled since 2014.

Separately, the Russian business newspaper Kommersant quoted local residents as saying that plumes of black smoke also rose over an air base in Crimea's Gvardeyskoye.

Ukraine has stopped short of publicly claiming responsibility for any of the fires or explosions, including last week's at another air base that destroyed nine Russian planes. If Ukrainian forces were, in fact, re-

sponsible for any of the explosions, they would represent a significant escalation in the war.

Crimea holds huge strategic and symbolic significance for Russia and Ukraine. The Kremlin's demand that Kyiv recognize the peninsula as part of Russia has been one of its key conditions for ending the fighting, while Ukraine has vowed to drive the Russians from the peninsula and all other occupied territories.

Videos posted on social media showed thick plumes of smoke rising over raging flames in Mayskoye, and a series of explosions could be heard in the background. The Russian Defense Ministry said the fires at the depot caused damage to a power plant, power lines, rail tracks and some apartment buildings. It said in a statement there were no serious injuries.

Earlier, Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti reported a fire at a transformer substation after "a loud thump sound" in what appeared to be a result of the blasts at the depot.

DOJ rebuffs efforts to unseal Mar-a-Lago warrant affidavit

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department on Monday rebuffed efforts to make public the affidavit supporting the search warrant for former President Donald Trump's estate in Florida, saying the investigation "implicates highly classified material" and that the document contains sensitive information about witnesses.

The government's opposition came in response to court filings by several news organizations, including The Associated Press, seeking to unseal the underlying affidavit the Justice Department submitted when it asked for the warrant to search Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate earlier this month.

Trump, in a Truth Social post early Tuesday, called for the release of the unredacted affidavit in the interest of transparency.

The court filing — from Juan Antonio Gonzalez, the U.S. attorney in Miami, and Jay Bratt, a top Justice Department national security official — argues that making the affidavit public would "cause significant and irreparable damage to this ongoing criminal investigation."

The document, prosecutors have said, details "highly sensitive information about witnesses," including people who have been interviewed by the government, and contains confidential grand jury information.

The government told a federal magistrate judge that prosecutors believe some additional records, including the cover sheet for the warrant and the government's request to seal the documents, should now be made public.

A property receipt unsealed Friday showed the FBI seized 11 sets of classified documents, with some not only marked top secret but also "sensitive compartmented information," a special category meant to protect the nation's most important secrets that if revealed publicly could cause "exceptionally grave" damage to U.S. interests. The court records did not provide specific details about information the documents might contain.

The Justice Department acknowledged Monday that its ongoing criminal investigation "implicates highly classified material."

British regulator 1st to OK Moderna's booster

Associated Press

LONDON—British drug regulators have become the first in the world to authorize an updated version of Moderna's coronavirus vaccine that includes protection against the omicron variant, which the government said would be offered to people aged 50 and over starting in the fall.

In a statement on Monday, the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency said it had given the green light to Moderna's combination "bivalent" vaccine, which will be used as an adult booster shot.

Each dose of the booster shot will target both the original COVID-19 virus that was first detected in 2020 and the omicron BA.1 variant that was first picked up in November.

British regulators said the side effects were similar to those seen for Moderna's original booster shot and were typically "mild and self-resolving."

"What this (combination) vaccine gives us is a sharpened

tool in our armory to help protect us against this disease as the virus continues to evolve," said Dr. June Raine, the head of Britain's health care and medicines regulator.

British health secretary Steve Barclay said the new shot will be part of the country's booster program rollout from September, based on advice from the government's vaccine experts.

"This safe and effective vaccine will broaden immunity and potentially improve protections against some variants as we learn to live with this virus," Barclay said.

Such an approach, combining protection against several strains of the same disease is used with flu shots, which are adjusted each year depending on the variants that are circulating and can protect against four influenza strains.

Stephane Bancel, Moderna's Chief Executive, said in a statement that it was the first regulatory authorization for a vaccine

aiming to fight the omicron variant, predicting the booster would have an "important role" to play in protecting people against COVID-19 in the winter.

On Friday, Germany's health minister said the European Medicines Agency might clear tweaked COVID-19 boosters next month.

In June, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration told vaccine makers that any booster shots tweaked for the fall would have to include protection against the newest omicron variants, meaning BA.4 and BA.5, not the BA.1 subvariant included in Moderna's latest shot.

Last month, the FDA said it was no longer considering authorizing a second COVID-19 booster for all adults but would instead focus on revamped vaccines for the autumn that target the newest viral subvariants.

Both Moderna and Pfizer are currently brewing updated versions of their vaccine to include BA.5 in addition to the original

COVID-19 virus.

According to the World Health Organization, the latest global surge of COVID-19 has been driven by omicron subvariant BA.5, which is responsible about 70% of the virus samples shared with the world's largest public virus database.

The subvariant BA.5 is even more infectious than the original version of omicron and has some genetic differences that earlier vaccines might not address.

Scientists have warned that the continued genetic evolution of COVID-19 means drugmakers will likely be one step behind the virus in their efforts to tailor their vaccines.

"The virus is unlikely to stand still and Omicron-targeted immunity, might push the virus down other evolutionary paths," warned Jonathan Ball, a professor of virology at Britain's University of Nottingham.

Britain says monkeypox outbreak slowing down

Associated Press

LONDON—British health officials say the monkeypox outbreak across the country "shows signs of slowing" but that it's still too soon to know if the decline will be maintained.

In a statement on Monday, the Health Security Agency said authorities are reporting about 29 new monkeypox infections every day, compared with about 52 cases a day during the last week in June. In July, officials estimated the outbreak was doubling in size about every two weeks.

To date, the U.K. has recorded more than 3,000 cases of monkeypox, with more than 70% of cases in London.

The agency also said more than 27,000 people were immu-

nized with a vaccine designed against smallpox, a related disease.

"These thousands of vaccines, administered by the (National Health Service) to those at highest risk of exposure, should have a significant impact on the transmission of the virus," the agency said. It said the vast majority of cases were in men who are gay, bisexual or have sex with other men and that vaccines were being prioritized for them.

Last month, Britain downgraded its assessment of the monkeypox outbreak after seeing no signs of sustained monkeypox transmission beyond the sexual networks of men who have sex with men; 99% of infections in the U.K. are in men.

Kenya opposition figure to challenge results of election

Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya — Opposition figure Raila Odinga said Tuesday that he would challenge the results of Kenya's close presidential election with "all constitutional and legal options" after Deputy President William Ruto was declared the winner, bringing new uncertainty to East Africa's most stable democracy.

Now the country faces weeks of disputes and the possibility that the Supreme Court will order another election. Religious and other leaders have pleaded for calm to continue in a nation with a history of deadly post-election violence.

"Let no one take the law into their own hands," Odinga said to his supporters.

It was Odinga's first appearance since Kenya's electoral commission chairman declared Ruto the winner Monday with almost 50.5% of the votes. Four of the seven commissioners abruptly announced that they couldn't support the results, and Odinga supporters scuffled with the remaining commissioners at the venue where the announcement was made.

Shortly before Odinga spoke, the four commissioners asserted to journalists that the chairman's final math added up to 100.01% and that the excess votes would have made a "significant difference."

They also said he didn't give them a chance to discuss the results before making his declaration.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Ex-employee shut down PD website over dispute

MA NEWTON — Officials in a Boston suburb are investigating a former city employee they say shut down the police website during a pay dispute.

Newton Mayor Ruthanne Fuller said the former employee, who was the police department information technology director, took down the department website in late June and July. The website instead directed visitors to a message that called on them to contact Fuller and ask the mayor to restore it, The Boston Globe reported.

Fuller said the employee controls access to the site and has not turned it over to the city. Newton has created a new police department website in its place. The old website was no longer active.

The Globe reported that the employee felt he was owed \$137,000 in compensatory time at the time he shut down the website, the paper reported.

2 people dead after SUV crashes into restaurant

NC WILSON — A sport utility vehicle crashed into a North Carolina fast-food restaurant, killing two sibling customers, police said.

The single-vehicle crash occurred at a Hardee's restaurant in Wilson, around 40 miles east of the state capital, Raleigh.

The Lincoln Aviator struck brothers Christopher Ruffin, 58, and Clay Ruffin, 62, both from Wilson, according to a police news release. Christopher Ruffin was pronounced dead at the scene, while his brother died at

ECU Health Medical Center in Greenville.

Police identified the driver as Jesse Lawrence, 78, of Wilson, who was treated at Wilson Medical Center and released. The investigation was still ongoing, but police said they didn't believe the crash to be medical- or impairment-related.

Deputy frees bear who was trapped inside car

TN COSBY — A Tennessee deputy responded to reports for a bear in a car.

A Cocke County Sheriff's Office deputy responded to the call. After failed attempts to reach wildlife officials, the deputy shot out a rear passenger window with two 12-gauge bean bag rounds, breaking the glass. The bear climbed out and away without any apparent injuries, WATE-TV reported.

The owner of the SUV told officials that she heard a car door shut, and then checked the car and found the bear.

While inside the car, the bear chewed most of the upholstery and electronics, breaking the locking mechanism, according to the police report. There was no cause for the bear to enter the car, such as food or trash, police reported.

Authorities capture fugitive after 9 months

WI MADISON — Authorities have captured a Wisconsin fugitive in Ohio after a nine-month search.

The U.S. Marshals Service said a task force of marshals and police found Robert Johnson Jr. at a residence in Toledo. Johnson fled in a vehicle but crashed it as police gave chase and was

apprehended.

The marshals service said Johnson escaped from custody in November 2021 while a private company was transporting him from Laredo, Texas, to jail in Janesville, Wis.

He asked to have his handcuffs removed so he could use the bathroom at Mitchell International Airport in Milwaukee, according to the marshals service. Once he was uncuffed, he punched his transporter and escaped.

Johnson was wanted on charges of escape, drug possession, a sex offender registration violation and a parole violation.

Man's plan to ambush cops thwarted by training

SC COLUMBIA — A 25-year-old man with a hand-drawn map that included "dead pigs" written at the bottom tried to ambush deputies from his home but his plan was stopped when the deputies followed training and got out of the firing zone, a South Carolina sheriff said.

One deputy was slightly injured when one of 16 rounds fired by the man hit and shattered the windshield of his patrol car, Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott said at a news conference.

Other bullets were found in nearby homes and cars in the densely packed suburban neighborhood northeast of Columbia. The shooter walked outside and killed himself, but no one else was hurt, Lott said.

The deputies came to the home after the man called 911 twice to say a woman was being beaten by a man. While several officers responded since it was a

potentially life-threatening call, only one deputy approached the home, ruining the shooter's plans, the sheriff said.

"His intent was to kill as many Richland County deputies as he could," Lott said.

Lott showed a hand-drawn map the shooter made of the floor plan of his parents' home. It indicated at least four points where he could fire on deputies with outside trees and other obstructions drawn as well.

Angler wins record prize at White Marlin Open

MD OCEAN CITY — An angler from suburban Washington, D.C., got a record prize at the annual White Marlin Open on Maryland's Eastern Shore, who with the boat on which he landed the winning fish earned more than \$4.5 million.

Jeremy Duffie, of Bethesda, Md., reeled in a 77.5-pound white marlin on Friday's final day of the open while fishing on the Ocean City boat Billfisher. That exceeded Thursday's 71.5-pound white marlin caught by Keeley Megarity, of Houston, while on the C-Student boat from Southside Place, Texas. They received \$197,000 for second place, open officials said.

There were several other contest categories.

The winning 511-pound blue marlin was landed by Bill Britt from Sandy Spring, Md., who was on board the Cabana out of Fenwick Island, Del. The tuna winner was Jason Hersh, of Maple Glen, Pa., who fished aboard the Southern C's out of Ocean City to reel in a bigeye of 247.5 pounds.

— From wire reports



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Flacco, 37, steps in at QB for Jets

Associated Press

FLORHAM PARK, N.J. — There are moments — and they seem to be increasing by the year — when Joe Flacco knows his teammates are laughing at him.

It's not for anything he's doing on the field. But the New York Jets quarterback is 37 years old, and that's practically ancient when you consider he's on a roster filled with guys who were still learning how to add, subtract and read when he was starting his NFL career.

"I don't view myself as an old person," Flacco said with a smile. "But every now and then, when these guys come up to you and say something to you, I'm like, 'Oh, OK, you think I'm like 50 years old. I got it.'"

Still a kid at heart with the arm of a youngster, Flacco is the Jets' QB1 while New York awaits the results of Zach Wilson's arthroscopic knee surgery Tuesday in Los Angeles. Wilson is expected to miss two to four weeks with a torn me-

niscus and bone bruise in his right knee, but it could be more if doctors discover additional damage.

While Wilson playing in the season opener on Sept. 11 against Baltimore remains a possibility, it would seem more likely that Flacco is under center against the Ravens — his old team — and perhaps a few opponents beyond. It all depends on Wilson's knee.

Until then, Flacco is preparing just as he always has.

"I'm happy with what I'm doing, and I love helping out a young guy and playing my role on this team," Flacco said. "But I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't have the desire to still be really good at what I do and didn't believe that I could still play this game."

Coach Robert Saleh has raved about Flacco since the team re-signed him in March to be Wilson's backup. Saleh has run down the list of accomplishments, which include winning the Super Bowl and the

game's MVP award to cap the 2012 season with the Ravens. He has thrown for 41,269 yards and 227 touchdowns in his 14 NFL seasons.

Flacco has been a starter and, at one time, the highest-paid quarterback in league history. He has also been a backup and mentor. Now, he needs to be a starter again, at least for the next few weeks — and possibly the start of this season.

"He's a veteran," Saleh said, "and I just expect him to approach it like he has his entire career."

Flacco realizes he's part of an older generation of players — especially in his own locker room. After all, Wilson is 23. Cornerback Sauce Gardner, the Jets' top draft pick in April, is a mere 21. There are only eight players out of 90 even in their 30s, with Flacco topping the list — and newly signed left tackle Duane Brown right behind him, with his 37th birthday on Aug. 30.

"Every now and then, you

think about the fact that I'm the oldest person in the room and it's tough to wrap my head around because when you're in the locker room and around a bunch of ... I mean, Sauce is like 20 or 21 years old," Flacco said. "I view myself as 25, 26 at max, so it's just one of those things you just get used to it and you develop relationships and all that other stuff just goes out of the window."

Age becomes just a number if you can still perform. Just ask Tom Brady, who retired after last season but is back for another year with Tampa Bay at age 45.

"Tom's different," Flacco said. "To be able to do what he has done, it's crazy."

But what Flacco is doing isn't too shabby, either. And while the age gap between him and the rookies continues to grow with each season, Flacco's teammates keep the father of five feeling young.

Even if it's by him being the butt of their old-man jokes.

Bengals' Burrow returns, should be ready for opener

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Three weeks after having an appendectomy, Joe Burrow is fully participating in training camp with an eye toward getting ready for the regular-season opener next month.

The Bengals quarterback was in full uniform as he threw crisp passes in seven-on-seven drills for a second day Monday. He had surgery July 26, a day before the first workout of camp.

"The seven-on-sevens are more just mentally getting back in the groove of things, the timing of the throws, the accuracy, going against the defense and trying to see some of the disguises," Coach Zac Taylor said before practice Monday.

"I got a chance to see him throw the ball farther than I'd seen him throw (Sunday)," Taylor said. "He looked crisp on that, he played on time, he was aggressive with his decision-making. I thought he moved well, and so again, we'll just take it day by day."

Taylor said he's satisfied with the practice schedule moving forward with his franchise quarterback, who hasn't talked to reporters since his surgery.

"We've got a good plan in place now," Taylor said. "As we narrowed it down to what it's going to look like over this week, we feel like we've got a good timeline on the rest of training camp and what we can do on offense to make sure he's getting all the looks he needs to see. For him, it's (about getting ready for) Pittsburgh. Be ready for Week 1 of the season."

Receiver Tee Higgins is also back at practice after rehabbing from the shoulder surgery he had after the Super Bowl loss to the Los Angeles Rams in February.

The starting trio of receivers — Ja'Marr Chase, Tyler Boyd and Higgins — were back on the field together, along with the new starter at tight end, Hayden Hurst.

"It's good to see Tee out there running around for sure," Taylor said. "He's such a

big target, a game-changer. He does bring a lot of energy to the huddle as well. They all bring certain energy, but then when you combine them all it's just one big ball of energy. They really play off each other, and it's pretty cool to see that group together."

Higgins, who rehabbed on the sidelines all the way through the organized team workouts in May and June, said he's back to 100%.

"It felt good to be tired and actually running routes, just being out there with the guys, huffing and puffing. It felt good," he said.

Taylor said few, if any, of the starters will play Sunday against the New York Giants as evaluation continues for rookies and players on the bubble.

Cincinnati will practice against the Rams for two days before the final preseason game Aug. 27. The regular season opener is at home against AFC North rival Pittsburgh on Sept. 11.

Aces are top seed, WNBA debuts new format

Associated Press

A'ja Wilson and the Las Vegas Aces will begin their quest for their first WNBA title a lot sooner than top seeds have done in previous few years.

The Aces clinched homecourt throughout the playoffs on the regular season's final day by earning the top seed in the WNBA postseason that begins Wednesday.

Before this year, Las Vegas would have a bye until the semifinals. The league changed the playoff format to best-of-three series in the quarterfinals instead of the single-elimination games in the opening two rounds it had been using since 2016.

"We're not done yet. This is the beginning," Wilson said after the Aces clinched the top seed on Sunday. "The regular season was nice, but now it's real. It doesn't matter what number is by your name in the playoffs. It could be anybody's night on any given day.

"It's playoffs. Either you want it or you don't."

The top four seeds — Las Vegas, Chicago, Connecticut and Seattle — will all host the first two games of their series with a po-

tential decisive game three on the home court of the lower seed.

Breanna Stewart was happy that the league changed the playoff format.

"I think in the WNBA all teams are deserving of a series," she said. "It's a respect for the teams that make it. Striving for greatness throughout the whole season shouldn't finish with one game on the line. We're a professional league. It should be exciting and it will be interesting with the 2-1 best-of-three."

Stewart will try to help teammate Sue Bird head into retirement with a fifth WNBA championship. The fourth-seeded Storm have a tough first-round matchup against Washington.

"This league continues to elevate the game and get better and better," Stewart said. "Everybody knows there's players on each team that can go off."

Health status

Dallas played without Arike Ogunbowale (abdominal issue) the last few games and Phoenix's Diana Taurasi was sidelined down the stretch with a quad injury. Both teams will be hard-pressed to advance

without them in the lineup. Phoenix also could still be without guard Skylar Diggins-Smith, who missed the last couple of games because of personal reasons.

Back-to-back?

Chicago is trying to become the first team to repeat as champion since Los Angeles won consecutive titles in 2001 and 2002. The Sky host New York in the opening round.

Exciting finish

New York and Phoenix didn't secure postseason berths until the final day of the regular season. The Liberty knocked off Atlanta and Phoenix advanced when Minnesota lost to Connecticut earlier in the day, ending the career of WNBA great Sylvia Fowles.

Under the radar

The Connecticut Sun finished with the league's third-best record, behind Las Vegas and Chicago. The Sun closed out the season with eight wins in their final 10 games and will try to capture the franchise's first title.

Seahawks send Amadi to Eagles for Arcega-Whiteside

Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — The Seattle Seahawks agreed Monday to trade defensive back Ugo Amadi to the Philadelphia Eagles for wide receiver/tight end J.J. Arcega-Whiteside.

The deal involves players who haven't completely lived up to the expectations their teams had when they drafted them. Amadi has played mostly as a nickel cornerback and backup safety for the Seahawks. Arcega-Whiteside has struggled to get involved offensively for the Eagles and was switched to tight end this offseason.

Seattle is likely to keep Arcega-Whiteside as a wide receiver due to the team's depth at tight end.

Amadi was a fourth-round pick in 2019 and has started 12 of 47 regular-season games. Seattle signed nickel cornerback Justin Coleman in the offseason

and has used rookie Coby Bryant in that spot during training camp.

Arcega-Whiteside was a second-round selection in 2019 and has been maligned for his lack of production while the likes of DK Metcalf, Dionte Johnson and Terry McLaurin were selected after him.

CFP championships back in Atlanta, Miami

Atlanta and South Florida have been selected to host College Football Playoff national championship games for the second time.

The CFP announced Monday that Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Fla., would be the site of the title game scheduled to be played in January 2026, the final game of the current 12-year media rights deal with ESPN.

Miami Gardens hosted the 2021 game, following the 2020 pandemic-altered season.

"South Florida was a great host for the 2021 national championship game despite the event having to be scaled back because of COVID-19, and we look forward to returning in 2026 with a full complement of events and activities during national championship weekend," CFP Executive Director Bill Hancock said in a statement.

The game between Alabama and Ohio State at Hard Rock Stadium, home to the Miami Dolphins, was limited to about 15,000 fans because of COVID-19 restrictions. The stadium holds more than 65,000.

In its announcement, the CFP said the host of the 2025 game also was selected and would be announced at a later date.

A person familiar with the decision, speaking to The Asso-

ciated Press on the condition of anonymity because the official announcement had not been made, said Mercedes-Benz Stadium would be the site of the 2025 game.

Princeton coaching great Carril dies at 92

Pete Carril, the ruffled, cigar-smoking basketball coach who led Princeton to 11 appearances in the NCAA Tournament, where his teams unnerved formidable opponents and rattled March Madness with old-school fundamentals, died Monday. He was 92.

Carril, a Hall of Famer, schooled his teams in a distinct and throwback brand of ball — the Princeton offense, a game marked by patience, intelligence, constant motion, quick passing and backdoor cuts that often ended in layups.

Urías helps Dodgers shut out Brewers

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Julio Urías continued his career-long pattern of shutting down lineups after the All-Star break.

The NL West-leading Los Angeles Dodgers hope he can stay hot all the way through the postseason.

Freddie Freeman and Gavin Lux homered to back Urías' five solid innings, and the Dodgers blanked the Milwaukee Brewers 4-0 on Monday night. Urías (13-6) is 10-0 with a 1.99 ERA over his last 11 starts.

"We've got to be getting close to him being in the Cy Young race here," Freeman said. "Every single time he goes out there, it's a chance for us to win. And it's a chance for him to throw a scoreless outing it seems like every single time."

Urías has a career 1.87 ERA after the All-Star break, the lowest in major league history by anyone who has pitched at least 180 innings after the Midsummer Classic.

He came through again for Los Angeles on a day when it announced two-time All-Star right-hander Walker Buehler will have season-ending elbow surgery. Buehler's injury had prevented him from pitching for the last two months.

Rays 4, Yankees 0: New York was shut out in consecutive games for the first time since 2016, losing to Ryan Yarbrough and

visiting Tampa Bay.

The Yankees failed to provide any run support for ace Gerrit Cole (9-5), whose only run allowed followed a misplay in center field by Aaron Hicks.

Orioles 7, Blue Jays 3: Ryan Mountcastle hit a two-run home run in his return to the lineup, Ryan McKenna had his first three-hit game, and surging Baltimore won at Toronto to improve to 9-4 in August.

Braves 13, Mets 1: William Contreras and Eddie Rosario hit back-to-back homers off Carlos Carrasco in the second inning, Ronald Acuña Jr. doubled three times and drove in three runs, and host Atlanta routed New York.

The Braves scored eight runs in the sixth inning, including a three-run homer by Travis d'Arnaud. They won their seventh straight and moved within 4½ games of the NL East-leading Mets.

White Sox 4, Astros 2: Yoán Moncada hit a tiebreaking two-run single as host Chicago rallied with four runs in the eighth to beat Houston.

Tigers 7-1, Guardians 5-4: Jonathan Schoop and rookie Kerry Carpenter hit back-to-back homers in the sixth inning, and Detroit rallied to split a doubleheader with host Cleveland and snap an eight-game skid.

All-Star Andrés Giménez belted a go-

ahead, three-run homer in the seventh inning of the opener. Giménez added a two-run homer in the nightcap, finishing with four hits and five RBIs on the day.

Marlins 3, Padres 0: Sandy Alcantara threw seven innings of four-hit ball and host Miami beat San Diego.

Rangers 2, Athletics 1: Marcus Semien homered, rookie Bubba Thompson had a tie-breaking RBI single and host Texas beat Oakland.

Twins 4, Royals 2: Max Kepler went 3-for-4 with a slump-busting RBI and host Minnesota beat Kansas City.

Phillies 4, Reds 3: Noah Syndergaard won for the second time in three starts since being traded to Philadelphia and Edmundo Sosa drove in three runs in a win at Cincinnati.

Nationals 5, Cubs 4: Nelson Cruz hit a tie-breaking homer in the eighth inning as host Washington beat Chicago.

Giants 6, Diamondbacks 1: Evan Longoria hit a two-run homer and Alex Cobb pitched six solid innings to lead San Francisco past visiting Arizona.

Mariners 6, Angels 2: Los Angeles star Shohei Ohtani struck out eight and allowed two runs in six innings, before visiting Seattle scored four runs in the ninth and took advantage of shoddy fielding.

Rangers' Woodward fourth manager fired this season

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — The Texas Rangers fired fourth-year manager Chris Woodward on Monday, a move made in hopes of building momentum toward next year, when the team has long expected to win again after a seasonslong rebuilding effort.

The Rangers are on pace for their sixth consecutive losing season since their last AL West title in 2016. While better than last year's 102-loss team, they haven't made the desired progress this year, or even had a winning record at any point since spending a half-billion dollars last winter to sign shortstop Corey Seager and second baseman Marcus Semien.

"We did not come into this

season thinking we had put together a championship roster. We thought we'd taken a major step forward in talent from where we were a year ago," said Jon Daniels, the team's president of baseball operations. "We've certainly had aspirations maybe to overachieve some and still do have those, but we were, and continue to be, realistic about about where we are. ... That said, we did think that we'd be better than our record, and better than the way that we've played at times."

After peaking at 24-24 at the end of May, Texas lost its next three games and five of six. The Rangers, who were 6-24 in one-run games under Woodward, beat Oakland 2-1 on Monday

night in third base coach Tony Beasley's first game as interim manager. Texas improved to 52-63 and has won three straight for the first time in two months.

Woodward, the fourth big league manager to be fired this season, was two games shy of managing his 500th game for the Rangers. He finished with a 211-287 record, which came during the extended rebuilding process that also included the pandemic-shortened 2020 season and the MLB lockout last winter after the team had signed Seager and Semien.

Philadelphia's Joe Girardi was replaced by Rob Thomson on June 3, the Los Angeles Angels' Joe Maddon by Phil Nevin four days later and Toronto's

Charlie Montoyo by John Schneider on July 13.

Daniels, who was the general manager when Woodward was hired, and current GM Chris Young both spoke about making the managerial change now to start addressing items such as how the team prepares and its style of play.

"I think it's just the overall structure, the environment. It's not necessarily the content of the preparation, but the way it's utilized," Young said. "The way we utilize meetings, the way we utilize different resources throughout the day, creating a structure that's really tailored towards winning a game every single day when we come in, and we felt like at times that got a little loose."