

Taiwan and China hold opposing drills

Associated Press

HUALIEN, Taiwan — Taiwan is staging military exercises to show its ability to resist Chinese pressure to accept Beijing's political control over the self-governing island, following new rounds of threatening drills from China.

The exercises Wednesday off the southeastern county of Hualien follow days of Chinese missile firings and incursions into Taiwan's sea and airspace by ships and planes from the People's Liberation Army, the military wing of China's ruling Communist Party.

"We strongly condemn Communist China's continuous military provocations around Taiwan's sea and air that undermine regional peace," Taiwan Defense Ministry spokesperson Sun Li-fang told reporters at Hualien Air Force Base.

"Communist China's military operations just provide us with the opportunity for combat-readiness training," Sun said.

Taiwan's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Joanne Ou said China was using recent vis-

its by U.S. Congress members including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi as a pretext for escalating its attempts to intimidate Taiwan into accepting what it has called its terms for "peaceful reunification."

"China launched military provocations on these grounds. This is absurd and a barbaric act, which also undermines regional stability and interferes with shipping and commercial activities in the Indo-Pacific region," Ou said.

China sees the island as a breakaway province to be annexed by force if necessary, and considers visits to Taiwan by foreign officials as acknowledging its sovereignty.

Alongside its military threats, China imposed visa bans and other sanctions Tuesday on Taiwanese political figures. China exercises no effective legal authority over Taiwan and it's unclear what effect the sanctions would have.

China has refused all contact with Taiwan's government ever since shortly after the 2016 election of President Tsai Ing-wen

of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party. Tsai was overwhelmingly reelected in 2020.

The DPP also controls the legislature, while the vast majority of Taiwanese favor maintaining the status quo of de facto independence along with strong economic and social connections between the sides.

China has accused Washington of encouraging the island's independence through the sale of weapons and engagement between U.S. politicians and the island's government. The United States has said it does not support independence and has no formal diplomatic ties with the island, but it is legally bound to ensure Taiwan can defend itself against threats from China, including a blockade.

Aside from putting its military on alert, Taiwan has largely played down the threat from the Chinese exercises and life has continued as normal among a population of 23 million that has lived under the shadow of bellicose rhetoric and saber rattling from China for more than seven decades.

Navy's top officer touts relationship with Spain

By ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

NAVAL STATION ROTA, Spain — The U.S. chief of naval operations emphasized Spain's vital role in NATO and praised its "rock-solid" partnership with the service Wednesday against a backdrop of talks about basing more U.S. destroyers there.

Speaking dockside to reporters, Adm. Michael Gilday stressed that the focus for his visit to Naval Station Rota remained on the ships already in port, such as the destroyer USS Bulkeley, which arrived Wednesday.

The four destroyers at Rota form a significant part of NATO's ballistic missile defense. They're ported on Spain's southern Atlantic coast not far from the Strait of Gibraltar, which some of Russia's Baltic Sea-based warships have transited en route to Ukraine's Black Sea coast.

The U.S. destroyers also patrol the Mediterranean Sea, where Russian submarine

activity has increased in recent years.

Gilday offered no details about a plan to bring the number of Navy destroyers forward-deployed to Spain from four to six, except to say that high-level talks are ongoing.

Bulkeley joins USS Arleigh Burke, USS Roosevelt and USS Paul Ignatius as homeported ships at Rota. Two other destroyers at Rota, USS Ross and USS Porter, are scheduled to return to the United States but an exact time frame has not been announced.

The Navy has maintained four destroyers at Rota, a Spanish port along the Atlantic Ocean not far from Gibraltar, since about 2014.

In June, the White House expressed a desire to send two more, saying the additions would increase the U.S. and NATO maritime presence in the Euro-Atlantic area, USNI News reported in June.

Gilday said the U.S. could not serve its

own interests and those of allies without strong working relationships with other nations.

"The U.S. Navy's ability to have our destroyers forward-deployed in Spain is an exceptional opportunity for us to help keep those sea lanes open, to work with our allies and partners in doing so," he said.

Bulkeley left Norfolk, Va., on Aug. 4, a homeport shift to Rota that is part of the service's plan to gradually rotate the destroyers based there.

The ship recently completed a two-year maintenance cycle. The time in the yard included significant upgrades in its technology and capability, Gilday said.

Capt. William Harkin, commanding officer of the Bulkeley, said the ship's crew of about 320 sailors is excited to be homeported in Spain.

Harkin said the ship and its crew aim to be "a stabilizing force here in the region" for the next five years.

Navy pledges \$115K in bonuses to get vets back

By FRANK ANDREWS
Stars and Stripes

The Navy announced a hefty bonus program aimed at enticing its veterans — and veterans of other services — to reenlist.

The Navy is offering a \$50,000 signing bonus and up to \$65,000 in student loan repayments for a “life-altering \$115,000,” Rear Adm. Lex Walker, the head of Navy Recruiting Command, said in a news release Aug. 6.

The Navy, like other branches of the U.S. military, is facing a tough year for recruiting. A record low percentage of young Americans are eligible to serve and even fewer are willing to

consider it, NBC News reported June 27. Further complicating recruiters’ efforts are a low unemployment rate and lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Air Force in July announced its own bonus program to lure recruits into 22 active-duty career fields. Bonuses for prospective airmen range from \$3,000 to \$58,000 if they sign up by Sept. 30, the end of the federal government’s fiscal year. The Air Force needs thousands to sign up to meet its 2022 recruit goal of 26,000 recruits.

Likewise, veterans lured by the Navy bonuses need to act by

Sept. 30. Some conditions apply. Veterans must re-enter the service in pay grade E-4 or below, meet specific bonus eligibility and not have received a bonus in their first enlistment, according to the Navy release.

“If you are a Sailor, Marine, Airman, Soldier, Guardian or Coast-Guardsman who recently separated, this is an opportunity without precedent,” Walker wrote. “And if you have student loan debt, you could be eligible for the Loan Repayment Program if you ship in any month of any fiscal year while the program remains active.”

The bonus program has

\$10,000 available for high school seniors who enter the delayed entry program by Oct. 31 and graduate from high school before shipping out in July 2023.

Navy veterans attracted by the bonus need not attend boot camp but will complete in-processing at Recruit Training Command Great Lakes in Illinois. Veterans of other services would enter a three-week naval orientation course and complete the same training a typical recruit would experience, including ship-handling, live-fire, swim qualifications and fire-fighting, according to the Navy release.

US exploring ‘all options’ in Alkonis case

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — U.S. and Japanese authorities are negotiating for a “successful resolution” to the case of Lt. Ridge Alkonis, a Navy officer serving three years in Japanese prison for a fatal car crash last year, a State Department spokesman said Tuesday.

The State Department, the Department of the Defense and the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo are hoping to find a resolution consistent with both countries’ laws and existing treaties, according to State Department spokesman Ned Price.

Alkonis, 34, of Claremont, Calif., reported to the Tokyo Detention House on July 25 to begin the sentence handed him by the Shizuoka District Court in Shizuoka prefecture.

The court found him guilty of negligent driving causing death, after his car plowed into pedestrians and parked cars outside a soba restaurant in Fujinomiya on May 29, 2021.

Alkonis, his wife and three children were returning from a hike on Mount Fuji.

A woman, 85, died that day; her son-in-law, 54, died June 11, 2021. A second

woman, 53, the daughter and wife of the other victims, was injured.

Alkonis — a weapons officer aboard a Yokosuka-based destroyer — testified Aug. 24 that a case of mountain, or altitude, sickness caused him to lose consciousness behind the wheel.

The district court judge dismissed that defense, as the Tokyo High Court did when it denied his appeal July 13. Alkonis’ supporters, including U.S. Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, and Rep. Mike Levin, D-Calif., have alleged he received an unfair trial and aspects of the status of forces agreement with Japan were violated.

N. Korea tests 2 missiles; South’s president marks 100 days

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea fired two cruise missiles toward the Yellow Sea on Wednesday, hours before South Korea’s president again publicly offered economic incentives if the communist regime curtails its nuclear weapons program.

The missiles were launched around dawn from South Pyon-

gyang province toward the west coast, the South Korean Ministry of Defense said in a statement to reporters. South Korean and U.S. intelligence agencies were analyzing the launches, the ministry said.

The U.N. Security Council prohibits North Korea from launching ballistic missiles. Cruise missiles, however, are not banned.

Around 10 a.m., South Korean

President Yoon Suk Yeol delivered a speech marking his 100th day in office. He spoke an hour after a meeting of the country’s senior security officials.

In his remarks, Yoon repeated an offer of economic assistance he made the previous day. The offer is conditioned on North Korea displaying a “firm will” toward denuclearization, he said.

“If North Korea changes naturally as the results of a variety of our economic and diplomatic support toward North Korea, we welcome the changes,” the president said.

After that speech, State Department spokesman Ned Price said the United States “strongly” supports South Korea’s “aim to open a path for serious and sustained diplomacy with Pyongyang.”

Syria denies it is holding US journalist Tice

By SARAH DADOUGH
The Washington Post

BEIRUT — Syria denied on Wednesday that it is holding missing U.S. journalist Austin Tice, who was abducted in Syria a decade ago at the height of the civil war that has torn the country apart.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry addressed President Joe Biden's claim last week that Tice is being held by the Syrian government, calling it "invalid accusations against the Syrian government of kidnapping or arresting U.S. citizens, among them Austin Tice, a service member in the U.S. Army." It added that Tice and others had entered illegally.

"Syria emphasizes that any official dialogue or communication with the U.S. government side will only be public and based on the rule of re-

specting the sovereignty and independence and unity of the Syrian Arab Republic's land," the statement said.

It also placed the fault squarely on the U.S. government, saying it had broken the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations when it "not only turned a blind eye but encouraged tens of U.S. citizens to travel to Syria and enter its lands illegally and without permission from its government, through nonofficial border crossings or by sneaking into areas that are controlled by terrorist armed groups."

Tice was abducted in Damascus on Aug. 14, 2012, just days after his 31st birthday. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps and later became a journalist covering Syria, including for *The Washington Post*.

"We know with certainty that

he has been held by the Syrian regime," Biden said in a statement on Aug. 10. "We have repeatedly asked the government of Syria to work with us so that we can bring Austin home."

In early May, Biden met with Tice's parents and promised to work on securing his release.

"The Tice family deserves answers, and more importantly, they deserve to be swiftly reunited with Austin," Biden said. "We stand with Austin's many loved ones, and we will not rest until we bring Austin home. Ten years is far, far too long. So is every additional day."

Tice was last seen in a video posted on YouTube soon after his disappearance showing him blindfolded and being led through rugged terrain by armed men in white robes. Tice served as a Marine in Iraq and

Afghanistan and then graduated from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. He attended the law school there until 2012 when he decided to cover Syria as a freelance journalist. Journalists covering the conflict outside the Syrian government's control had to enter the country illegally through Turkey or other neighboring countries.

Tice won a Polk Award for his reporting.

In August 2020, Kash Patel, the U.S. counterterrorism chief, and Roger Carstens, the presidential envoy for hostage affairs, traveled to Damascus in the first contacts between the two governments in 10 years. They brought up Tice but Syrian media said officials refused to discuss the case until the U.S. agreed to discuss its withdrawal from the country.

Plea deals rejected in sub secrets sale case

By PAUL DUGGAN
The Washington Post

A federal judge Tuesday rejected plea bargains for a Navy engineer and his wife who allegedly tried to sell military secrets, saying the prison terms called for by the deals were too lenient for a couple accused of offering nuclear submarine data to a foreign government.

Jonathan Toebbe, 43, a civilian engineer for the Navy, and Diana Toebbe, 46, a private-school teacher, lived in Annapolis, Md., before they were arrested in October in a case involving a year-long FBI sting and cloak-and-dagger elements that seemed straight out of a spy novel, including the attempted transfer of confidential submarine data hidden in a peanut butter sandwich, authorities said.

In plea bargains with federal prosecutors — signed early this

year and initially accepted by a federal magistrate — the couple admitted to violating the Atomic Energy Act. The deals called for Jonathan Toebbe to be sentenced to 12½ to 17½ years in prison, while his wife would get a three-year term. But the couple withdrew their guilty pleas Tuesday after U.S. District Judge Gina M. Groh, in Martinsburg, W.Va., threw out the agreements.

"It's not in the best interest of this community or, in fact, this country to accept these plea agreements," she said from the bench. "I don't find any justifiable reason for accepting either one of these plea agreements."

For nearly an hour before Groh's ruling, two defense lawyers and an assistant U.S. attorney had argued, to no avail, that the prison terms called for in the deals were appropriate.

Personnel barred from blood donation now eligible to give

By NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

Service members, veterans and others who were once barred from blood donation because they had lived in Europe decades ago at the height of transmission of "mad cow disease" are now eligible at military donor centers.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently removed restrictions, following a less inclusive change in 2020, that for decades had prevented some 4.4 million veterans, service members and Defense Department civilians from donating blood, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"Donors who were previously deferred for mad cow disease risk can now give blood directly to the military at (Armed Services Blood Program) blood drives on military installations throughout Europe," program

officials said in a statement Wednesday.

"They can help save the lives of U.S. and NATO military on and off the battlefield as well as patients in U.S. military hospitals around the world like Landstuhl Regional Medical Center" in Germany, the statement said.

The American Red Cross said it also will change and simplify its recommendations to defer donations from people who spent time in certain European countries or on military bases and were previously considered to have been exposed to a potential risk of transmission of the disease.

Mad cow disease, also known as variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, is attributed to human infection with the agent of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, likely from consumption of contaminated beef products, according to the FDA.

Biden signs big climate, health care legislation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden signed Democrats' landmark climate change and health care bill into law on Tuesday, delivering what he has called the "final piece" of his pared-down domestic agenda, as he aims to boost his party's standing with voters less than three months before the midterm elections.

The legislation includes the most substantial federal investment in history to fight climate change — some \$375 billion over the decade — and would cap prescription drug costs at \$2,000 out-of-pocket annually for Medicare recipients. It would also

help an estimated 13 million Americans pay for health care insurance by extending subsidies provided during the coronavirus pandemic.

The measure is paid for by new taxes on large companies and stepped-up IRS enforcement of wealthy individuals and entities, with additional funds going to reduce the federal deficit.

In a triumphant signing event at the White House, Biden pointed to the law as proof that democracy — no matter how long or messy the process — can still deliver for voters in America as he road-tested a line he will likely repeat later this fall ahead of the

midterms: "The American people won, and the special interests lost."

"In this historic moment, Democrats sided with the American people, and every single Republican in Congress sided with the special interests in this vote," Biden said, repeatedly seizing on the contrast between his party and the GOP. "Every single one."

The House on Friday approved the measure on a party-line 220-207 vote. It passed the Senate days earlier with Vice President Kamala Harris breaking a 50-50 tie in that chamber.

"In normal times, getting these bills done would be a huge

achievement," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said during the White House ceremony. "But to do it now, with only 50 Democratic votes in the Senate, over an intransigent Republican minority, is nothing short of amazing."

Biden signed the bill into law during a small ceremony in the State Dining Room of the White House, sandwiched between his return from a six-day beachside vacation in South Carolina and his departure for his home in Wilmington, Del. He plans to hold a larger "celebration" for the legislation on Sept. 6 once lawmakers return to Washington.

Trump foe Cheney loses Wyoming GOP primary

Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. — Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, Donald Trump's fiercest Republican adversary in Congress, soundly lost a GOP primary, falling to a rival backed by the former president in a rout that reinforced his grip on the party's base.

The third-term congresswoman and her allies entered Tuesday downbeat about her prospects, aware that Trump's backing gave Harriet Hageman considerable lift in the state where he won by the largest margin during the 2020 campaign. Cheney was already looking ahead to a political future beyond Capitol Hill that could include a 2024 presidential run, potentially putting her on another collision course with Trump.

On Wednesday, calling Trump "a very grave threat and risk to our republic," she told NBC that she thinks that defeating him will require "a broad and united front of Republicans, Democrats and independents — and that's what I intend to be part of."

She declined to say if she would run for president but con-

ceded it's "something that I'm thinking about."

Cheney described her primary loss on Tuesday night as the beginning of a new chapter in her political career as she addressed a small collection of supporters, including her father, former Vice President Dick Cheney, on the edge of a vast field flanked by mountains and bales of hay.

"Our work is far from over," she said, evoking Abraham Lincoln, who also lost congressional elections before ascending to the presidency and preserving the union.

Cheney will now be forced from Congress at the end of her third and final term in January. She is not expected to leave Capitol Hill quietly.

She will continue in her leadership role on the congressional panel investigating the Jan. 6 attack until it dissolves at the end of the year. And she is actively considering a 2024 White House bid — as a Republican or independent — having vowed to do everything in her power to fight Trump's influence in her party.

DHS IG rebuffs House on Secret Service testimony

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Homeland Security Department's inspector general has refused congressional requests for documents and staff testimony about the erasure of Secret Service communication related to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, angering top Democrats who have accused him of unlawfully obstructing their investigation.

In an Aug. 8 letter disclosed Tuesday, Inspector General Joseph Cuffari told the leaders of the House Oversight and Homeland Security committees that his office will not comply with their requests for internal documents and sit-down interviews due to the ongoing criminal investigation into deleted Secret Service text messages.

In response, House Oversight Chair Carolyn Maloney and Homeland Security Chair Bennie Thompson sent a letter Tuesday demanding Cuffari turn over documents and make his staff available to lawmakers or risk facing a potential congressional subpoena.

"Your obstruction of the Committees' investigations is unacceptable, and your justifications for this noncompliance appear to reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of Congress's authority and your duties as an Inspector General," Maloney and Thompson wrote in the letter.

"If you continue to refuse to comply with our requests, we will have no choice but to consider alternate measures to ensure your compliance," they wrote.

It's just the latest back-and-forth over the text messages since mid-July, when Cuffari sent a letter to Congress disclosing that Secret Service text messages sent and received around Jan. 6, 2021, were deleted despite requests from Congress and federal investigators that they be preserved.

Maloney and Thompson gave Cuffari's office until Aug. 23 to provide "all responsive documents" and make personnel available for interviews before lawmakers issue a congressional subpoena.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Jet part falls from sky, nearly hits State House

ME AUGUSTA — A metal object believed to have fallen from a trans-Atlantic jet came crashing down outside the Maine State House, landing with a loud bang just feet from a Capitol Police worker, officials said Monday.

The Federal Aviation Administration was alerted Friday and returned to the State House on Monday as it investigated the object, Capitol Police Chief Matthew Clancy said.

The metal hit with a loud bang on a slab of granite lining a cobblestone walkway about 6 to 8 feet from a security screener — and came close to hitting the building itself, he said. No one was hurt.

The FAA believes the metal sleeve weighing 6 to 7 pounds came from a wing flap of a large passenger jet, he said.

Police: Car crash at pub appears to be accidental

VA ARLINGTON — Police investigating a crash that injured more than a dozen people at a popular northern Virginia pub over the weekend said Monday that they don't believe the crash was intentional.

A ride-share driver crashed into Ireland's Four Courts in Arlington on Friday evening. Nine people were taken to the hospital, and six others were treated and released.

Arlington police said three patients remained hospitalized Monday. One was in critical condition and two were in stable condition.

Police said their preliminary investigation indicates that the crash was accidental and alcohol was not a factor. They said the

ride-share driver is cooperating with investigators.

Man shoots, kills bear after it entered home

CO DENVER — A Colorado man had a rude awakening early Saturday morning when a roughly 400-pound bear flipped the lever doorknob to his home and rummaged through some dog food, Colorado Parks and Wildlife officials said Monday.

The homeowner, Ken Mauldin, grabbed a gun and shot the bear multiple times until it collapsed and died just after 2 a.m., said Rachel Gonzalez, spokesperson for Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

Officers removed the animal from the house, located in the ski-resort town of Steamboat Springs.

Colorado has roughly 12,000 bears and break-ins aren't uncommon in Rocky Mountain towns. People shooting and killing bears in self-defense, however, is rare, said Gonzalez.

At least 4 dead in crash after high-speed chase

TX SANDERSON — Four people were killed when a high-speed chase ended in a fiery head-on collision on a remote West Texas highway, officials said Monday.

The episode began at dusk Friday on U.S. 90 just east of Sanderson, about 230 miles west of San Antonio, according to a Monday statement by the Texas Department of Public Safety.

A DPS trooper was making a stop on a crew-cabbed pickup when the truck sped away.

A chase ensued through Sanderson and north on U.S. 285, then ended when the truck

veered into the oncoming lane of the two-lane highway and slammed into an oncoming pickup. Both vehicles erupted in flames, as did a vehicle damaged by debris from the collision.

The unidentified driver and a rear-seat male passenger from Mexico in the fleeing truck were killed, along with both Del Rio, Texas, men in the oncoming truck, the DPS said. A front-seat passenger in the fleeing truck, a woman from Honduras, was airlifted to an Odessa hospital, where she was listed in serious condition. The occupant of the third vehicle was not injured, the DPS said.

Car lands in sinkhole from water main break

MA BOSTON — A break in a 20-inch water main in Boston early Monday sent water rushing down a city street, formed a sinkhole that swallowed a vehicle, and flooded area basements, city officials said.

The burst pipe in the city's South End was reported at about 3:30 a.m., according to the Boston Water and Sewer Commission. The water main is about 150 years old, but was updated in the 1970s, the commission said.

The flood also buckled the roadway, which was closed to traffic.

The water was shut off and construction crews responded to the area to fix the roadway.

Worker killed on road duty; driver charged

NC SIMS — A North Carolina Department of Transportation worker was killed when a vehicle struck her as she directed traffic around a fallen tree, the State Highway Patrol

said. A motorist was later arrested and charged with fleeing the scene.

Anna Bradshaw, 60, was struck Friday morning by a passenger car while she was holding a sign along U.S. Highway 264 Alternate in Wilson County, according to patrol trooper Jordan Lamm.

The driver got out of the car and spoke with another DOT worker at the scene and said he hadn't seen Bradshaw, but left when the worker went to call for help, Lamm said.

The patrol said in an email that Jamari Marquis Powell, 31, of Bailey, was taken into custody late Friday and charged with felony hit and run.

Long-hidden synagogue mural rehabbed, moved

VT BURLINGTON — A mural that was painted in a Vermont synagogue more than 100 years ago by a Lithuanian immigrant — and hidden behind a wall for years — has been termed a rare piece of art and has been painstakingly moved and restored.

The large colorful triptych painted by sign painter Ben Zion Black in 1910 shows the Ten Commandments with a lion on both sides, the sun beaming down, and columns and rich curtains at the borders. Now known as the "Lost Mural," it's a rare representation of a kind of art that graced wooden synagogues in Europe that were largely destroyed during the Holocaust, experts have said.

In its new home, conservators restored damaged sections of paint and cleaned the entire mural.

The renewed mural was unveiled this summer, and tours are ongoing.

— From wire reports

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NFL looks normal in Year 3 of COVID

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Derrick Henry has been seen jogging on the field with his daughter after practice. Green Bay Packers are once again borrowing kids' bicycles for rides to practice. Fans are rubbing elbows with their favorite players to get those coveted autographs.

Yes, the NFL is looking and acting like it's essentially back to normal going into its third season dealing with COVID-19.

There are no more trailers or tents for testing, and masks are rare. In fact, the protocols devised and tweaked by the league and the NFL Players Association in 2020 and 2021 were suspended last March.

The NFL seems to be following the lead of the CDC, which dropped social distancing and quarantine requirements last week with an estimated 95% of Americans 16 and older acquiring some level of immunity from vaccinations or infections.

The league still wants anyone with possible symptoms to speak up and wear a mask after

contact with someone with COVID-19. A positive test still means isolating at home for at least five days.

"I think we are always concerned about everybody's safety, ours and the health of our families," Tennessee Titans coach Mike Vrabel said, adding that 2½ years into the pandemic: "Hopefully we are past that."

The biggest changes have been the easiest to notice at training camps across the NFL: Fans are back and close enough to high-five and shake hands with players, no longer kept at a distance and happy to resume preseason traditions.

Players are happy to have fans fully back, grateful for the energy boost during the monotonous routine and long days of camp.

"It's huge," Packers running back Aaron Jones said. "The fans are everything. They're what makes football go, and I would say this is one of the best traditions in football, the bike rides. I've had my same little bike rider since I came in, got to

bring my son to practice with me as well, so it's special to me."

The Packers were among the teams that allowed fans to watch training camp practices in 2021 at a distance, though no interaction with players was allowed.

Cheers are very welcome after the relative silence the past two years when the only sounds were pads thudding, coaches yelling and occasionally music over speakers to simulate fan noise. Families of players, coaches and team staffers couldn't attend either, preventing them from stealing a few minutes at work with their kids or spouses.

Henry's daughter Valentina, now 2, is the perfect age to enjoy racing her father to an end zone after an early practice at camp. The two-time NFL rushing champ said it's the kind of moment his daughter can look at when older.

"Having these moments are always precious, especially with your kids, but just being in football and training camp it

takes up a lot of time," Henry said. "But any time you get a moment like that, you always cherish those moments and something that we can look back at and laugh at and enjoy."

Vaccinations eased the protocols from 2020 when teammates had to keep 6 feet apart and coaches wore masks on the field whether in practice or games no matter if teams were inside or outdoors. Titans center Ben Jones said that meant friends sitting apart for breakfast and lunch, making it tough to build team chemistry and camaraderie.

"It made it a lot of challenges for me who's a guy who's trying to get five guys on the same page to do it spread out," Jones recalled. "It's not what you want. As a guy on the team, as a leader, you want as many guys as close as possible so you can have an impact on them."

The social distancing signs are gone. So, too, are the mandatory tests, saving time each morning spent waiting for a positive or negative result.

Raiders' White has spent life overcoming obstacles

Associated Press

HENDERSON, Nev. — Scotland High School coach Richard Bailey has watched a handful of players make it to the NFL out of Laurinburg, N.C., with none more special than Las Vegas Raiders rookie Zamir White.

Shortly after the Raiders took White with the 122nd pick in the NFL Draft, he said it was a moment he'd been waiting for his entire life.

Affectionately known as Zeus, the now-chiseled 225-pound power back weighed 1 pound when his mother was six months pregnant. Doctors wanted to terminate the pregnancy. His great-grandmother demanded otherwise, even if it meant he could exhale only

once.

White was born with a cleft lip and cleft palate and was given two weeks to live. He spent the first three months of his life in a hospital, as he developed a leak in his kidney and needed surgery for a hernia.

Later in life, White tore his right ACL as a senior in high school and then his left ACL after arriving at the University of Georgia — both within a year.

White's story was chronicled by the SEC Network and ESPN. "The amount of resiliency he's shown in his life, and I think overcoming what he did as a young boy, and then having a cleft lip issue, and being real shy and little introverted, and being picked on a little bit when he

was younger — I think that really has just hardened him," Bailey told The Associated Press during a phone interview. "I also think he feels like God kind of saved him, and he wants to make the most of this opportunity."

White has been impressive during training camp. He opened the preseason with 52 yards on 11 carries and 23 yards from three receptions in a 27-11 win over the Jacksonville Jaguars in the Hall of Fame Game.

"He is very special, and I think it's unbelievable what he's gone through in his life, what his family's gone through in their life, and to see the adversity that he has continually overcome — he just keeps doing it," quarter-

back Derek Carr said. "And then to see him get out there in the first preseason game and run with that violence and run with that passion the way that he did, it was unbelievable."

Speaking to the media in person Monday for the first time, White displayed wholesome giddiness.

As he fought through his speech impediment with politeness, he excitedly addressed reporters with "sir" and "ma'am" while donning a bright smile as he discussed his journey.

He credited his freshman season under Bailey for developing his running style, adding it was then that he earned his nickname Zeus by "running real fast and being powerful."

Rangers look to contend next season

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — The Rangers are more than a decade removed from their only World Series appearances, and mired in the longest stretch of consecutive losing seasons in the franchise's half-century in Texas.

They are again looking for a new manager.

Less than nine months after a record offseason spending spree of more than a half-billion dollars, the Rangers fired Chris Woodward with the first-time manager late in his fourth season of what had become an extended rebuilding process.

They will have a losing record for the sixth year in a row unless they win at least 29 of their last 46 games — and to finish above .500 would need one more win than that.

What Texas really hopes to do over these final seven weeks is to build momentum going into 2023, which general manager Chris Young said is still when they expect to be a playoff-caliber team again.

"We want to continue to create a competitive, energetic team that takes the field night in, night out prepared to win," Young said. "And I think that we want to see improvement in our fundamentals, just the basic fundamentals. It's some-

thing that we haven't executed those at the level we need to to become a championship team."

The Rangers will get more looks at youngsters such as speedy outfielders Leody Taveras and Bubba Thompson, and infielders Josh Smith and Ezequiel Duran, and left-handed starter Cole Ragans, who are all already in the big leagues.

The front office will start to evaluate potential managerial candidates. The next full-time manager will be the fourth for Texas since Jon Daniels, now president of baseball operations, became the team's general manager in October 2005.

Arozarena, Rays roll past struggling Yankees

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Randy Arozarena hit a three-run homer off Nestor Cortes in the first inning and the Tampa Bay staff made it stand up, leading the Rays over the skidding New York Yankees 3-1 Tuesday night.

Starter Jeffrey Springs (5-3) and four relievers combined on a four-hitter, and the crowd of 41,083 at Yankee Stadium booed their AL East leaders at times.

Tampa Bay got only four hits while winning its fourth straight and closing within nine games of the Yankees, who have lost 11 of 13 and were held to three runs or less for the seventh straight game.

New York avoided being blanked in three straight games when Andrew Benintendi tripled in the fifth and scored on a fielding error on a grounder by Miguel Andújar.

Cortes (9-4) allowed three runs and four hits in seven innings. He struck out three, walked none and retired 19 of his final 21 hitters.

Braves 5, Mets 0: Charlie Morton was dominant on the mound, Matt Olson and Robbie Grossman went deep, and host Atlanta blanked NL East-leading New York for its eighth straight win.

Morton (6-5) surrendered three hits and a walk in 6½ innings, posting his fourth double-

figure strikeout game of the season with 12 Ks as Atlanta pulled within 3½ games of the division leaders.

Phillies 11, Reds 4: Rhys Hoskins homered twice and drove in five runs as Philadelphia posted the 10,000th win in franchise history, winning at Cincinnati.

The Phillies became the last of the original eight National League franchises to reach the mark. At 10,000-11,163, Philadelphia is the only team among them with a losing record.

Nick Castellanos homered and doubled twice and scored three times. Darick Hall and Garrett Stubbs also homered for the Phillies, who hold the second spot in the wild-card race. Kyle Gibson (8-5) struck out 11 in six innings.

Cardinals 5, Rockies 4: Paul Goldschmidt and Tommy Edman homered, and host St. Louis scored the winning run when Tyler O'Neill was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded in the bottom of the ninth inning, edging Colorado.

Andrew Knizner and Lars Nootbaar drew walks off Dinelson Lamet (1-2) in the ninth, and Dylan Carlson reached on a bunt single to load the bases before O'Neill was plunked.

Orioles 4, Blue Jays 2: Cedric Mullins and Adley Rutschman hit back-to-back home runs, Ra-

món Urías drove in the tiebreaking run in the sixth inning and Baltimore won at Toronto for its 10th victory in 14 August games.

Dean Kremer (5-4) matched his career high by pitching seven innings, winning for the second time in three starts. He allowed two runs and seven hits with one walk and six strikeouts. Félix Bautista struck out a pair in the ninth for his seventh save in eight chances.

Marlins 4, Padres 3: Nick Fortes hit two solo homers and scored the go-ahead run in the seventh inning, leading host Miami past San Diego.

Peyton Burdick hit a tiebreaking RBI double that scored Fortes, who had singled against Padres reliever Luis García (4-6) and advanced on a groundout before Burdick's line drive bounced inside the foul line in right.

Red Sox 5, Pirates 3: Nick Pivetta pitched one-hit ball over seven shutout innings for his first win since June 24, and Boston scored four runs in the first inning on its way to a victory at Pittsburgh.

Twins 9, Royals 0: Sonny Gray matched his season high with 10 strikeouts and Gio Urshela had four hits as host Minnesota beat Kansas City.

Tigers 4, Guardians 3: Rookie Kerry Carpenter homered for the

second straight night and Detroit survived a wild ninth inning to win at Cleveland.

Brewers 5, Dodgers 4 (11): Victor Caratini hit a two-run single off Los Angeles closer Craig Kimbrel in the 11th inning, rallying host Milwaukee.

Cubs 7, Nationals 5 (11): Patrick Wisdom drove in the go-ahead run in the 11th inning, and Chicago won at Washington.

White Sox 4, Astros 3: Yoán Moncada hit a go-ahead single in the eighth inning for the second straight game, and host Chicago rallied to beat Houston.

Athletics 5, Rangers 1: Elvis Andrus homered against his former team for the first time, Shea Langeliers doubled on the first pitch he saw in the big leagues and visiting Oakland ended Texas' three-game winning streak and snapped its own nine-game skid.

Giants 2, Diamondbacks 1: Brandon Crawford hit a game-ending two-run homer off Ian Kennedy (4-6) after Thairo Estrada's two-out triple, and host San Francisco rallied past Arizona.

Mariners 8, Angels 2: Adam Frazier broke up José Suárez's bid for a perfect game in the sixth and added a two-run triple in the ninth, leading Seattle to a win at Los Angeles.

LIV golfers face long road back to PGA Tour

Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. — Long before the PGA Tour's postseason opener ended with a winning bogey in a three-hole playoff, the biggest drama was in the clubhouse at the TPC Southwind.

A dozen or so players gathered around a screen to watch the outcome in the first of what figures to be many court fights between the PGA Tour and Saudi-funded LIV Golf.

"I walked by player dining and I saw about 10 really nervous people pacing all around the room and I thought, 'Well, there's something going on,'" Jon Rahm said.

He was curious enough to stay for the finish.

This one went to the tour. A federal judge denied the request of three LIV golfers to compete in the FedEx Cup playoffs. Talor Gooch, Hudson Swafford and Matt Jones were in Memphis, Tenn., in case they got the green light but soon were

headed home.

When will they return?

That was one of the realities that came out of the ruling, even if it was an emergency hearing. More detailed arguments for a temporary injunction could come later. U.S. District Judge Beth Labson Freeman said her first open spot for an evidentiary hearing was Sept. 27-29.

That's the week of the Presidents Cup.

The assumption is the three players — possibly more if they chose not to resign from the PGA Tour — want freedom to play both circuits. For now they are suspended — or banned, which is the word used in a text exchange from February between Sergio Garcia and Greg Norman.

"Hi Sharky! It's official, the Tour has told our manager this week that whoever signs with the League, is ban from the Tour for life! I don't know how are we gonna get enough good players to join the League under this conditions. What do you think?" Garcia said in his text, now part of

the court documents.

Norman replied: "They cannot ban you for one day let alone life. It is a shallow threat. Ask them to put it in writing to you or any player. I bet they don't. Happy for anyone to speak with our legal team to better understand they have no chance of enforcing."

Judge Freeman ruled otherwise.

For some players, it might be awkward to be in the same tournament as the 10 players who are suing the PGA Tour. This is starting to get personal. Until now, any hard feelings were over someone wearing spikes too long or getting called "Brooksie."

The notion of a lifetime ban is premature. Even so, the reality is LIV golfers might not be seen on the PGA Tour anytime soon whether they want to or not.

"It doesn't look like it," Rahm said. "I'm confident that the LIV side of things are still going to push strong to keep trying to change some things."

Farewell tour stumble: Serena falls to Raducanu

Associated Press

MASON, Ohio — The second stop on Serena Williams' farewell tour was a short one.

The 40-year-old Williams fell to 0-2 in matches since announcing "the countdown has begun" on her career, losing 6-4, 6-0 to U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu in the Western & Southern Open on Tuesday night.

Williams said last week in a Vogue magazine essay and an Instagram post that her career was winding down, although she did not explicitly say the U.S. Open, which begins Aug. 29 in New York, would be her last tournament.

The Cincinnati event was the second U.S. Open tuneup for Williams, and the next time she takes the court will be at Flushing Meadows. She lost to Belinda Bencic in straight sets last week in Toronto. A day before the announcement, Williams beat Nuria Parrizas-Diaz for

her first match win since the 2021 French Open.

Williams is a 23-time Grand Slam champion, most recently in 2017 at the Australian Open, when she was pregnant with daughter Olympia. She said wanting to expand her family was a big reason she plans to step away.

Raducanu, ranked No. 19 in the world, was sharp as she dispatched Williams — and quieted the vocally pro-Williams crowd — in 1 hour, 5 minutes.

"I can't believe I just played Serena Williams," the 19-year-old Raducanu said. "It's something that I think I'm really fortunate to have been able to do, and for our careers to have crossed when there's such a big (age) gap and watching her growing up, it was an amazing experience to just play her."

Williams did not speak to reporters after the match.

Fans cheered heartily when Williams was introduced.

Little League World Series back with 4 more teams

Associated Press

The Little League World Series is back to its old self, and more.

After no tournament in 2020 and no international clubs in 2021, both due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the youth baseball tournament has expanded to 20 teams from around the world that will play ball in South Williamsport, Pa., starting Wednesday.

This year's series marks the 75th anniversary of the first tournament, which has become a staple of life in central Pennsylvania, not to mention an economic boost for South Williamsport — where the Little League complex is actually housed — and Williamsport, just across the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. Together, the communities of about 35,000 people have been looking forward to the return of fans and families.

"It's been a tough few years here. Last year we had a limited

World Series, of course, but there's nothing that can take the place of a full World Series," Williamsport Mayor Derek Slaughter said.

In 2021, only family and friends were allowed into the Little League complex's two stadiums for games. Missing were the traditional big crowds in lawn chairs on the hill behind Lamade Stadium, which will be the site of the championship on Aug. 28.

Slaughter estimated the 2022 World Series will bring 85,000 people into his city, while he added that having the tournament back in full swing could have a \$40 million to \$50 million impact on the community.

The mayor expects this year's attendance to exceed the success of pre-pandemic events. A number of factors play into that, including the return to a sense of normalcy and the excitement that comes with a benchmark like the 75th anniversary of the first tournament in 1947.