

US: Sailor's mom backed his passing data to China

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The mother of a U.S. Navy sailor charged with providing sensitive military information to China encouraged him to cooperate with a Chinese intelligence officer, telling her son it might help him get a job with the Chinese government someday, the prosecution said Tuesday.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Fred Sheppard made the accusation at a hearing in federal court in San Diego in urging the judge not to release Jinchao Wei, who was arrested last week on a rarely used espionage charge.

Prosecutors did not name the woman in court. As a result of that, The Associated Press could not try to find her or people who could comment on her behalf.

Wei is one of two sailors based in California accused of providing sensitive military information to China — including details on wartime exercises, naval operations and critical technical material. Prosecutors have not said whether the two were courted or paid by the same Chinese intelligence officer as part of a larger scheme.

The Justice Department charged Wei, 22, under an Espionage Act statute that makes it a crime to gather or deliver information to aid a foreign government.

Both sailors have pleaded not guilty.

Prosecutors have said Wei, who was born in China, was first approached by a Chinese intelligence officer in February 2022 while he was applying to become a naturalized U.S. citizen, and admitted to the officer that he knew the arrangement could affect his application. Even so, prosecutors say he provided the officer detailed information on the weapons systems and aircraft aboard the USS Essex and other amphibious assault ships that act as small aircraft carriers.

In arguing against his release, Sheppard told the court on Tuesday that when Wei went home for Christmas to see his mother, who lives in Wisconsin, she was aware of her son's arrangement. She also encouraged him to keep helping the Chinese intelligence officer because it might get him a job someday with China's Communist party after he leaves the

U.S. Navy, Sheppard said.

The AP asked Wei's defense attorney Jason Conforti in an email if he could speak on behalf of Wei's mother and provide a response to the prosecution's allegations. The AP also asked if he could provide contact information for her. The attorney did not immediately respond to the email.

Sheppard told the court that the intelligence officer told Wei that he and the Chinese government were willing to fly him and his mother to China to meet them in person, and that Wei searched online for flights to China this spring.

Sheppard said the officer also told Wei to buy a computer and phone to pass the information, and that if Wei provided a receipt, the Chinese government would reimburse him for the expenses.

Conforti told the court that Wei is not a danger to the community and no longer has access to any military information.

Sheppard countered that Wei's actions put thousands of sailors at risk by revealing sensitive information on Navy ships.

The judge ruled to keep him in federal custody without bond.

The indictment alleges Wei included as many as 50 manuals containing technical and mechanical data about Navy ships as well as details about the number and training of Marines during an upcoming exercise.

Sheppard said Wei has made \$10,000 to \$15,000 in the past year from the arrangement. If convicted, he could face up to life in prison.

The Justice Department also charged sailor Wenheng Zhao, 26, based at Naval Base Ventura County, north of Los Angeles, with conspiring to collect nearly \$15,000 in bribes from a Chinese intelligence officer in exchange for information, photos and videos involving Navy exercises, operations and facilities between August 2021 through at least this May.

The information included plans for a large-scale U.S. military exercise in the Indo-Pacific region, which detailed the location and timing of naval force movements.

Navy program offers more free uniforms for pregnant sailors

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN

Stars and Stripes

The Navy is expanding a congressionally directed program that provides moms-to-be with free uniforms during pregnancy, a move made with the aim of doubling the number of participating sailors.

Based on feedback, the service is adding four "sea bag component options" to its maternity uniform pilot program, Navy officials announced last week.

This will allow expectant sailors to choose the best combination of uniforms for their work environment, according to the Navy Personnel Command.

More than 850 sailors have received one set of each type of authorized maternity uniform since the program launched in January 2022, a Navy administrative message said last week.

Uniforms are delivered to the home of each participant ready to wear at no personal cost, regardless of where they are stationed.

Sailors will still receive the standard maternity uniforms, but effective immediately, additional choices are available, the message said.

Those include a "waterfront option" that comes with two sets of working uniforms, one service uniform, one dress blue or white uniform and a cardigan sweater.

One of two "ashore staff" options includes a Navy working uniform and two service uniforms; the other includes one or two dress uniforms.

Sailors can update their selection if their command directs a change in uniform requirements, the Navy said.

The Navy began issuing temporary uniforms to expectant officers and enlisted sailors after Congress in 2021 directed the Defense Department to provide free loaner uniforms.

The goal is to provide immediate savings to pregnant service members and evaluate the cost savings for the military.

US alerted Japan of China hacking defense networks

Bloomberg News

The U.S. warned Japan over the course of a year that Chinese state hackers had infiltrated its defense networks before Tokyo took sufficient action to try to secure them, according to current and former U.S. officials.

Senior U.S. national security officials grew increasingly concerned that sensitive information that the U.S. shares with some allies could be at risk as a result of the breach, which was discovered several years ago. That prompted multiple U.S. delegations since 2020 to fly to Tokyo to warn Japan, according to the officials, who asked not to be identified discussing the sensitive matter.

Still, the U.S. saw insufficient evidence Japan was taking action to secure its networks despite warning of a problem, said a former intelligence official. Gen. Paul Nakasone, director of the National Security Agency and commander of U.S. Cyber Command, was among U.S. officials who visited Tokyo to flag the issue.

But Japan wanted proof of the infiltration, said the former official, who added that

intelligence is sometimes too sensitive to share specifics. Japan was also reluctant to let the U.S. into its networks, the former official said.

Only after Anne Neuberger, deputy national security adviser for cyber and emerging technology, visited Japan in mid-November 2021 did the U.S. and Japan chart a successful way forward, according to the officials. Japan has since set about boosting its cybersecurity defenses, although the U.S. is eager to see it do more, according to statements from both countries this year, in addition to national security experts.

The breach and the U.S. warnings were reported earlier by The Washington Post, which cited multiple current and former U.S. and Japanese officials it didn't identify.

Yasukazu Hamada, Japan's defense minister, declined to comment on the Washington Post report, telling reporters in Tokyo on Tuesday that it doesn't comment on individual cyberattacks and how they are handled.

The Embassy of Japan in Washington didn't immediately respond to messages requesting comment.

US, Philippines defense chiefs confer on Chinese water-cannon incident

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Secretary of Defense on Tuesday joined his Filipino counterpart in condemning China's use of water cannons and "other dangerous maneuvers" against the Philippine coast guard over the weekend.

Two military-chartered civilian vessels, escorted by two Philippine coast guard ships, on Saturday attempted to move supplies to troops stationed on Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands when they encountered eight Chinese vessels attempting to block their way.

The ensuing stand-off escalated when a Chinese ship used high-powered water cannons against one of the supply vessels, according to the Philippine coast guard.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, in a call with Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr., said China's ships put the Philippine vessels and crews in danger, undermined the status quo and "directly threaten regional peace and stability," according to a Defense Department readout of the call.

The Philippine coast guard issued a similar statement on Sunday, when it called on China to "restrain its forces" and "respect the sovereign rights of the Philippines in its exclusive economic zone."

Beijing insists its actions were "in accordance with the law to safeguard China's sovereignty and maritime rights and interests" and its operations in the regions are "beyond reproach," according to a China's Defense Ministry news release.

Tropical storms taking aim at Japan, S. Korea

BY KELLY AGEE

Stars and Stripes

Sasebo Naval Base in southern Japan is bracing for the impact of Tropical Storm Khanun as it made its way north Wednesday after a lap around Okinawa last week.

Khanun is expected to pass 84 miles west of the naval base on Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, at 1 a.m. Thursday, according to the Joint Typhoon Warning Center. The forecast for the naval base calls for showers, nearby thunderstorms and southeasterly winds of 40 to 52 mph, gusting to 69 mph overnight Wednesday into Thursday.

The naval base — population 8,400, including 2,300 family members — is the homeport for the amphibious assault ship USS America and its amphibious ready group, and ships of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.

Nonessential services, such as the base commissary, Navy Exchange, restaurant, library and chapel, were closed Wednesday until all-clear is announced after the storm and recovery efforts, Graham said. Security forces, medical care, port operation and watch standers remained on duty.

Khanun as a typhoon made two passes at Okinawa on Aug. 1 and Sunday, injuring more than 40 people and leaving downed trees, flooded zones, closed highways and power outages. Authorities suspect two people died as a result of the storm.

Rains and winds were growing in southern South Korea on Wednesday as the storm drew closer to the Korean Peninsula, where it was forecast to slam into major urban areas, The Associated Press reported.

Dozens of flights and ferry services were grounded and tens of thousands of fishing vessels evacuated to ports as government officials raised concerns about potential damages from flooding, landslides and tidal waves triggered by the typhoon-strength winds, AP reported.

Sasebo was in Tropical Cyclone Condition of Readiness level 1 on Wednesday, base spokesman Petty Officer 1st Class Jeremy Graham, told Stars and Stripes.

"Preparations for the incoming storm have been made throughout the preceding TCCOR levels," Graham said.

FAA sends unruly-passenger cases to FBI

The Washington Post

Nearly two dozen airline passengers who yelled, cursed or assaulted crew members or passengers could face criminal prosecution.

The Federal Aviation Administration announced Tuesday it is referring 22 unruly-passenger cases to the FBI. The action brings the total number of cases referred this year to 39.

“Unruly behavior poses serious safety concerns for passengers and crew alike, which is why we are addressing this issue aggressively,” Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said in a statement accompanying the announcement.

Instances of passengers act-

ing out on commercial aircraft have dropped 80% since hitting record highs in early 2021. That year, the FAA received nearly 6,000 reports of unruly passengers, but by 2022, that number dropped to fewer than 2,500. Officials reported a sharp drop in onboard conflicts after the federal mask mandate — often a source of tension — was rescinded in April 2022.

Even though the number of cases has declined, bad behavior remains an issue.

Last week, a 39-year-old man was taken into custody after he allegedly grabbed a flight attendant and injured her with a “sharp object” on a Delta Air Lines flight headed from Atlan-

ta to New Orleans. Investigators said the man also harmed himself using the same object he used to injure the flight attendant.

The most recent set of cases referred to the FBI involved passengers who traveled between December 2021 and April of this year. One instance involved an attempt to breach the cockpit, while in two cases, the individuals had to be restrained and handcuffed. Several cases involved sexual or physical assaults, with one involving the sexual assault of an unaccompanied minor.

The FBI did not immediately respond to questions about how it has handled cases it has re-

ceived by the FAA. The FAA refers what it considers the most serious cases to the FBI.

The FAA also has its own process for handling some reports of bad behavior, which can result in significant fines.

In 2022, the agency announced it would seek a fine of \$81,950 from a passenger aboard a July 7, 2021, American Airlines flight from Dallas to Charlotte, N.C. The agency alleged that a passenger threatened a flight attendant who was trying to help her after she fell into the aisle.

The passenger then tried to open the cabin door and had to be restrained by two other flight attendants.

Regulation of guns without serial numbers reinstated

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court is reinstating a regulation aimed at reining in the proliferation of ghost guns, firearms without serial numbers that have been turning up at crime scenes across the nation in increasing numbers.

The court on Tuesday voted 5-4 to put on hold a ruling from a federal judge in Texas that invalidated the Biden administration’s regulation of ghost gun kits. The regulation will be in effect while the administration appeals the ruling to the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans — and potentially the Supreme Court.

Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Amy Coney Barrett joined with the court’s

three liberal members to form the majority. Justices Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Clarence Thomas would have kept the regulation on hold during the appeals process. Neither side provided an explanation.

The Justice Department had told the court that local law enforcement agencies seized more than 19,000 ghost guns at crime scenes in 2021, a more than tenfold increase in just five years.

“The public-safety interests in reversing the flow of ghost guns to dangerous and otherwise prohibited persons easily outweighs the minor costs that respondents will incur,” Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar, the administration’s top Supreme Court

lawyer, wrote in a court filing.

The new rule was issued last year and changed the definition of a firearm under federal law to include unfinished parts, like the frame of a handgun or the receiver of a long gun, so they can be tracked more easily. Those parts must be licensed and include serial numbers.

Manufacturers must also run background checks before a sale — as they do with other commercially made firearms. The requirement applies regardless of how the firearm was made, meaning it includes ghost guns made from individual parts or kits or by 3D printers.

The rule does not prohibit people from purchasing a kit or any type of firearm.

Ticket in Florida wins \$1.58B jackpot, 3rd-largest ever

Associated Press

NEPTUNE BEACH, Fla. — A single ticket sold in Florida is good for a \$1.58 billion Mega Millions jackpot, ending weeks of anticipation over who would win the eye-popping top prize.

A Publix grocery store in Neptune Beach sold the winning ticket, according to the Florida Lottery. The winning numbers drawn Tuesday night

were: 13, 19, 20, 32, 33 and the yellow ball 14. A message was left seeking comment Wednesday from Publix. Messages left for the Florida Lottery weren’t immediately returned.

Before the big win, there had been 31 straight drawings since the last time someone won the game’s jackpot on April 18. That enabled the prize to steadily grow to be the third-largest ever

in U.S. history.

Mega Millions jackpot winners are so rare thanks to odds of one in 302.6 million.

The \$1.58 billion payout would go to the winner if they opt for an annuity, doled out over 30 years. But people usually prefer a lump sum option, which for Tuesday’s jackpot was an estimated \$783.3 million. The prize money is subject

to federal taxes. Many states also tax lottery winnings.

A Florida law that went into effect last year allows the winners of lottery prizes in excess of \$250,000 to remain anonymous for 90 days. Also of note, there is also no state income tax in Florida.

Mega Millions is played in 45 states, Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

American nurse, daughter freed in Haiti

Associated Press

American nurse Alix Dorsainvil and her daughter were freed Wednesday, nearly two weeks after they were kidnapped in Haiti's capital, according to aid organization El Roi Haiti.

The Christian group founded by Dorsainvil's husband asked that neither she nor her family be contacted: "There is still much to process and to heal from in this situation," the group said in a statement.

The group added that it confirmed the safe release "with a heart of gratitude and immense joy." No other details were immediately available, including

whether any ransom was paid.

The U.S. State Department said it welcomed news that the two had been freed and thanked its Haitian and U.S. interagency partners for facilitating the release.

"We have no greater priority than the safety and security of U.S. citizens overseas," the agency said. "As you can imagine, these individuals have been through a very difficult ordeal, both physically and mentally."

Officials provided no other details.

Witnesses told The Associated Press that armed men had seized the New Hampshire native and

her young daughter in late July from a clinic in a gang-controlled area of Port-au-Prince where Dorsainvil works.

The Christian group has offered medical care, education and other basic services to people in the country's poorest areas.

Gang warfare has increasingly plagued Haiti since the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

Gang members regularly kill, rape and hold residents for ransom. A local nonprofit has documented 539 kidnappings since January, a significant rise over previous years.

On July 27, the U.S. State De-

partment had ordered the departure of non-emergency U.S. government personnel from Haiti, which remains under a "do not travel" advisory.

In a video posted on the El Roi Haiti website, Dorsainvil describes Haitians as "full of joy, and life and love," people she was blessed to know.

In a blog post, El Roi Haiti said Dorsainvil fell in love with Haiti's people on a visit there after the devastating 2010 earthquake hit the Caribbean nation.

Dorsainvil graduated from Regis College in Weston, Mass., where a program supports nursing education in Haiti.

US COVID hospitalizations on the rise since early July

Associated Press

Here we go again: COVID-19 hospital admissions have inched upward in the United States since early July in a small-scale echo of the three previous summers.

With an updated vaccine still months away, this summer bump in new hospitalizations might be concerning, but the number of patients is far lower than before.

For the week ending July 29, COVID-19 hospital admissions were at 9,056. That's an increase of about 12% from the previous week.

But it's a far cry from past peaks, like the 44,000 weekly hospital admissions in early January, the nearly 45,000 in late July 2022, or the 150,000 admissions during the omicron surge of January 2022.

"It is ticking up a little bit, but it's not something that we need to raise any alarm bells over," said Dr. David Dowdy, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

It's likely that infections are rising too, but the data is scant. Federal authorities ended the public health emergency in May, so the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and many states no longer track the number of positive test results.

Since early June, about 500 to 600 people have died each week. The number of deaths appears to be stable this summer, although past increases in deaths have lagged behind hospitalizations.

The amount of the COVID-19 virus in sewage water has been rising since late June across the nation.

Higher levels of COVID-19 in wastewater concentrations are being found in the Northeast and South, said Cristin Young, an epidemiologist at Biobot Analytics, the CDC's wastewater surveillance contractor.

"It's important to remember right now the concentrations are still fairly low," Young said, adding it's about 2.5 times lower than last summer.

This fall, officials expect to see updated vaccines that contain one version of the omicron strain, called XBB.1.5. It's an important change from today's combination shots, which mix the original coronavirus strain with last year's most common omicron variants.

Russia says it will boost its army near western borders in response to NATO moves

Bloomberg News

Russia will boost its military forces near its borders with NATO states, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said as he lashed out at the U.S. and its allies for providing support to Ukraine.

Shoigu told a meeting of defense officials Wednesday that "strengthening of troop formations" on Russia's western borders was necessary in response to what he said was a buildup of forces by North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries.

He singled out the "militarization of Poland" and said the entry of Finland and Sweden to NATO membership would be "seriously destabilizing" for Russia's security.

Taking into account the armed forces of eastern European countries, about 360,000 service people are stationed in the immediate vicinity of the borders of Russia and its ally Belarus, he said.

Russian President Vladimir

Putin's invasion of Ukraine, now in its 18th month, has triggered Europe's biggest conflict since World War II and reinvigorated NATO, as members of the defense alliance send billions of dollars in weapons to help the government in Kyiv defend itself. The war prompted Finland to join NATO, while Sweden's membership application is going through the ratification process.

Shoigu complained that deliveries of arms to Ukraine by the U.S. and its allies "creates serious risks of further escalation of the conflict." He didn't acknowledge that Russia had started the war.

Russia announced in January that it planned to expand its military to 1.5 million people from the existing target level of 1.15 million amid deepening tensions with NATO.

The Kremlin hasn't indicated how quickly the expansion will take place.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Shark not found after biting, injuring woman

NY NEW YORK — A woman was critically injured when a shark bit her on the leg while she was swimming at a New York City beach, officials said.

The 50-year-old woman was swimming off Rockaway Beach just before 6 p.m. Monday when a shark bit her on the left leg, the city parks department said in a statement.

Lifeguards pulled the woman from the water and administered first aid. The woman was taken to Jamaica Hospital in critical but stable condition with severe lacerations to her thigh, a police spokesperson said.

Lifeguards cleared all swimmers from the water, and the police used a helicopter to search the area for sharks but did not find any, the parks department said.

Judge: City can't clear camps during heat

CA SACRAMENTO — A federal judge has temporarily banned Sacramento from clearing homeless encampments for at least 14 days, citing the extreme heat forecast this month in California's capital city.

Judge Troy L. Nunley in the U.S. District Court for Eastern California issued the order last week after advocates for the homeless argued that the city disregarded its own protocol by pushing a vulnerable population out of shaded areas during blistering heat. Advocates said clearing the camps in such

weather puts homeless people in "obvious danger."

Sacramento defines temperatures above 90 degrees Fahrenheit as being "excessive heat" in its protocols, the complaint reads. The temperature at the state capital is forecast to hit 90 F or greater on 21 days in August.

The complaint includes details about a so-called sweep in mid-July, when the temperature was 91 F. Officials moved about 30 people who had been sheltering under large trees, the complaint said. While Sacramento had offered homeless people to relocate to another encampment, the site was already crowded and had no shade, advocates said in the complaint. The complaint cites coverage of the sweep in the Sacramento Bee.

Teacher with 'kill list' sentenced to probation

IN CROWN POINT — A former fifth-grade teacher in northwestern Indiana who was charged with felony intimidation after authorities say she told a student she had a "kill list" of students and staff has been sentenced to 2½ years on probation.

Angelica Carrasquillo, 25, of Griffith, pleaded guilty Friday to an intimidation charge in Lake County Superior Court, court records show.

The terms of a plea bargain bar Carrasquillo from working at a school or day care while on probation. It also requires court-monitored mental health treatment, and she is barred from contacting victims in the case, news outlets reported.

If she successfully completes

probation, she can petition to reduce the conviction to a misdemeanor.

Missing boater rescued in half-submerged boat

FL ST. AUGUSTINE — A boater who had been missing for more than a day and a half was rescued off the Florida coast in a half-submerged boat, authorities said.

The Coast Guard rescued 25-year-old Charles Gregory 12 miles off St. Augustine, Fla., on Saturday morning after he went missing on a 12-foot flat-bottomed boat.

A Coast Guard aircrew spotted him sitting in his partially submerged boat, and he was rescued by a Coast Guard boat crew. He didn't need any medical attention, the Coast Guard said in a news release.

Doctor charged with assaulting patients

NY NEW YORK — A New York City doctor was charged Monday in connection with the alleged sexual abuse of at least six women, including several patients who were drugged, filmed and assaulted during appointments at a prestigious local hospital, prosecutors said.

Zhi Alan Cheng was arraigned Monday on charges of sexually abusing three of his patients at New York-Presbyterian Queens Hospital and raping three other women inside his apartment in Queens. He pleaded not guilty.

The 33-year-old gastroenterologist was terminated from his hospital job in December after his arrest for allegedly raping a female acquaintance in his

Queens home. At the time, the woman told authorities she had discovered videos of Cheng abusing her and multiple other women.

As investigators searched his home and devices, they uncovered a trove of video evidence showing the doctor abusing women inside his home and workplace, according to the new indictment.

Authorities capture bears as suspects for break-ins

CA SOUTH LAKE TAHOE — California authorities have captured four suspects in multiple break-ins at homes around South Lake Tahoe: a mama bear and three of her cubs.

DNA has confirmed the large female black bear and her three little accomplices were responsible for at least 21 instances of property damage since 2022, the state Department of Fish and Wildlife said in a statement.

The mother bear and her babies were "safely immobilized" on Friday, the statement said. The adult female, known to researchers as 64F, will likely be taken to a sprawling wildlife sanctuary near Springfield, Colo.

Her cubs could end up at a rehabilitation facility in Sonoma County, Calif., "in hopes they can discontinue the negative behaviors they learned from the sow and can be returned to the wild," the statement said.

64F is one of three adult bears identified last year as being responsible for 150 incident reports, including property damage, in the lake region straddling Northern California and Nevada.

— From wire reports

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SEC seeking successors at quarterback

Associated Press

The Southeastern Conference must replace much of its star power at quarterback, including a pair of top-five draft picks and a two-time national champion.

That makes for some intriguing preseason camps around the league starting this week, especially with transfers who have already all but claimed the starting jobs or are trying to win them. Two-time national champion Georgia must replace Stetson Bennett. Perennial contender Alabama is seeking a successor to No. 1 pick Bryce Young, and Florida moves on without fourth overall selection Anthony Richardson.

Plus, Kentucky is replacing second-round pick Will Levis and Tennessee is replacing Hendon Hooker, the SEC offensive player of the year who was a third-rounder. Bennett went in the fourth round.

The league has a handful of entrenched returning starters, led by LSU's Jayden Daniels, Arkansas' KJ Jefferson, Mississippi State's Will Rogers and South Carolina's Spencer Rattler. Others are right where Da-

niels was a year ago: Transfers trying to earn their stripes in a new program.

"I say just to be a successful SEC quarterback you have to go in there and just really prepare, prepare like a pro," said Daniels, a former Arizona State player who led LSU to a Western Division title. "If not, you know, you might get exposed in this league because there are some great players out there playing against you."

Kentucky brought in Devin Leary from North Carolina State to replace Levis and Florida scooped up ex-Wisconsin starter Graham Mertz as Richardson's likely successor. Mississippi's returning starter, Jaxon Dart, faces renewed competition from veteran Big 12 passer Spencer Sanders.

Tennessee went a more traditional route with strong-armed Joe Milton poised for a promotion from backup. And AJ Swann returns at Vanderbilt.

The big competitions entering preseason camps:

Georgia: Coach Kirby Smart has made it clear that Carson Beck is the quarterback to beat. Beck has attempted 58 passes

over the past three seasons. Third-year player Brock Vandagriff was a five-star recruit.

Alabama: One-time Notre Dame starter Tyler Buchner rejoined his old offensive coordinator, newly hired Tommy Rees, to challenge 2022 backup Jalen Milroe and former five-star recruit Ty Simpson. Buchner announced his decision after spring practice, when neither Crimson Tide quarterback was able to separate themselves.

Ole Miss: This is one of the more intriguing QB scenarios in the league. Even with Dart, himself a USC transfer, coach Lane Kiffin brought in Sanders, who was a four-year starter at Oklahoma State and a 2021 first-team All-Big 12 performer. Plus, he landed LSU transfer Walker Howard. It makes for an enviable quarterback room, whoever wins the job for Kiffin.

Florida: Mertz was a three-year starter at Wisconsin. Jack Miller passed for 180 yards and was sacked four times in a 30-3 bowl loss to Oregon State.

"This guy has an incredible motor and work ethic," Gators coach Billy Napier said of

Mertz. "He is in the building and he is fanatical about his preparation. That's helped the competition. I think that's caused Jack to respond. Jack has had an incredible off-season and he's in position for a great camp."

Missouri: Brady Cook has started the last 14 games for the Tigers, going back to the 2022 Armed Forces Bowl. But, said coach Eliah Drinkwitz, "he's going to have his hands full holding onto that position with Sam Horn and Jake Garcia."

Garcia played in eight games at Miami last season, and like Horn is a former four-star recruit.

Texas A&M: Conner Weigman started four late-season games, passing for eight touchdowns without an interception. But former LSU starter Max Johnson is back after his season was cut short by a broken hand.

Auburn: Robby Ashford was a dual-threat player last season for Auburn, but only threw seven touchdown passes. Enter Michigan State graduate transfer Payton Thorne, a 29-game starter and two-time team captain for the Spartans.

ACC leaders mull Pac-12 teams; SMU also in mix

Associated Press

Atlantic Coast Conference presidents and chancellors held a conference call Tuesday but took no action on West Coast expansion with California and Stanford, a person with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press.

The person spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity because the league isn't publicly revealing internal discussions regarding realignment. Another person with knowledge of the situation said the conference's athletic directors were planning to have a call later Tuesday to continue discussions. The ADs also met Monday.

A third person told AP on the condition of anonymity that the ACC's conversations also include the possibility of adding SMU, the Dallas school currently in the American Athletic Conference.

The Pac-12 is down to four schools committed to the conference beyond the upcoming school year. This will be the last season in the Pac-12 for USC, UCLA, Oregon and Washington, which are all headed for the Big Ten in 2024. Arizona, Arizona State, Colorado and Utah will join the Big 12 next year.

The new Big Ten setup means athletes will be routinely crossing multiple time zones to compete.

"I share concerns about the impact that the recent spate of conference realignment activities will have on student-athletes' well-being," NCAA president Charlie Baker said in statement. "The recent conference moves highlight what I found during my review of the issues facing the NCAA — the growing gap between well-resourced Division I schools and the rest of the division is highly disruptive for all of DI and college sports

overall."

Southeastern Conference Commissioner Greg Sankey said on the SEC Network's "Paul Finebaum Show" that his league is not motivated to react to the recent moves.

"I would submit we're in an enormously healthy place. We're not in the current movement efforts," said Sankey, whose conference tipped the first domino in this round of realignment in 2021 when Texas and Oklahoma decided to leave the Big 12 for the SEC.

"We don't need to be in four time zones to generate interest on the West Coast, or really across the globe," Sankey said.

Sankey also said if the Pac-12 were to fold, decreasing the number of Bowl Subdivision conferences from 10 to nine, that would likely re-open discussions about the format for the expanded 12-team playoff that goes into effect in 2024.

Bonuses change lives for smaller teams

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Players who reached the knockout round at the Women's World Cup got larger individual bonuses that can be life-changing for many of them.

FIFA designated \$30,000 for the 732 players among 32 teams in the tournament field. The payout rises to \$60,000 for players on the 16 teams that advanced out of group play.

The money grows to \$90,000 for players in the quarterfinals and its a significant payday for many of the players, particularly those that have had financial disputes with their federations over pay and support.

Hildah Magaia, appropriately nicknamed the "Breadwinner" of South Africa's squad, helped the Banyana Banyana advance out of group play, into the knockout stage, and doubled her bonus.

She appropriately plans to use the money to care for her mother.

"I'll be able to do everything for my mother because I'm the

one who's taking care of her," she said. "I'm the breadwinner, so I'll be doing everything for my mom."

Deneisha Blackwood, part of the Jamaica squad eliminated by Colombia in the knockouts, described the minimum payouts as a good start for her team. Jamaica has had financial difficulties and relied on crowdfunding to raise money for its travel to the tournament.

"Obviously we as players have a life outside of football and I think prize money like that rewards us in ways we can't imagine. A lot of us have bills to pay and family to take care of," Blackwood said, "and I think for the younger generation, especially, football doesn't make you a lot of money. So for (girls) to see us doing what we love and realize that you can make a living off it — it's motivational."

No one can ensure all the players will receive their guaranteed bonuses.

The global players union, FIFPRO, last year sent a letter to FIFA on behalf of players from 25

national teams asking for better conditions within the tournament. FIFA announced the individual bonuses of the \$110 million prize pool in June.

But FIFA President Gianni Infantino said before the start of the World Cup that the federations would be responsible for distributing the payments. He was unable to make any guarantee that funds would reach the players.

FIFPRO said it was working to establish bank accounts for the players as well as an auditing process. But there have already been snags.

FIFPRO announced late Tuesday that it was assisting Nigeria's players in a dispute with their federation concerning bonus payments, camp allowances and expenses, some dating back to 2021. Nigeria narrowly missed the quarterfinals after a penalty shootout loss to England.

"The team is extremely frustrated that they've had to pursue the Nigeria Football Federation for these payments before and during the tournament," FIF-

PRO said. "It is regrettable that players needed to challenge their own federation at such an important time in their careers."

In the run-up to the World Cup, South Africa players boycotted a warm-up match against Botswana because the individual payments weren't included in their contracts. The dispute ended when billionaire Patrice Motsepe, the president of the African Football Confederation, agreed to contribute \$320,000 to be equally distributed among the players.

Some of the Jamaican players took to social media before the World Cup to complain about a lack of support and funding for the team. That spurred two crowdfunding campaigns to raise money for the Reggae Girlz.

The Jamaican Football Federation released a statement saying reports about the team's financial struggles had taken away from the team's accomplishments. The Reggae Girlz reached the Round of 16 but fell 1-0 to Colombia on Tuesday.

Vikings rookie WR Addison turning heads after rocky start

Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — Jordan Addison disturbed the Minnesota Vikings a few days before training camp with dangerous late-night behavior that tainted the start of his NFL career.

Once he finally got on the practice field, Addison has settled into the offense much more smoothly. The 21-year-old has been one of the early standouts of these preseason sessions that frequently make rookies feel and look as if they're swimming upstream in a torrent of complex information.

"He's got a lot of ability," quarterback Kirk Cousins said. "We've thrown him in basically, with all the complex run game schemes, motions, and formations and the route tree we're asking him to learn, and I think

he's handled it really well. He's shown his athleticism. He's a natural catcher of the football, tracks the ball well, so I'm excited about just continuing to do more with him and get him involved. Hopefully that can take pressure off of our other guys and just make teams have to defend even more grass."

Addison's performance has easily been one of the most promising developments of training camp for the Vikings, whose decision to release Adam Thielen for salary cap relief will test their depth behind superstar Justin Jefferson.

Jalen Nailor, the 2022 sixth-round draft pick, was recently halted by a leg injury. Trishton Jackson joined him on the sideline with a minor knee injury. The Vikings on Sunday signed

free agent N'Keal Harry, who was the 32nd pick in the 2019 draft by New England and played last season for Chicago.

Assuming Addison, the 23rd overall pick in the draft this spring out of USC, makes an immediate impact, K.J. Osborn continues to improve his game and tight end T.J. Hockenson again shines as a trusted receiver, Jefferson ought to be able to produce another All-Pro season and Cousins should be in great shape with more comfort in his second year in head coach Kevin O'Connell's scheme.

Without a significant contribution from Addison, though, there will be that much more pressure on the system and Cousins and everybody else in it to make the offense click.

"I just start by knowing the

plays, because if he sees that I'm on top of everything and I know where to be, then he's going to trust me to be down the field at the exact moment," Addison said.

The Vikings have big plans for him and haven't been afraid to push him on it.

"I want to see greatness at the catch point," Cousins said. "In this league you're going to make contested catches. Coverage is going to be tight. I'm going to have to throw it in tight windows, and you've got to show me with somebody draped over you or someone about to come hit you that you will have strong hands and make that catch. That's what Justin does well. That's what Adam does well. That's what K.J. does well, T.J. It's not for the faint of heart."

Tucker's grand slam in 9th stuns O's

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Kyle Tucker's grand slam off Félix Bautista in the top of the ninth inning gave the Houston Astros a 7-6 victory over the Baltimore Orioles on Wednesday night.

Houston trailed 5-0 after Ryan Mountcastle and Adley Rutschman homered off Framber Valdez in the first and second innings, but the Astros pulled off a remarkable comeback in the ninth.

Pinch-hitter Jon Singleton led off the ninth with a walk, and Jose Altuve followed with a single. Bautista (6-2) struck out Alex Bregman, but Yordan Alvarez came within a few feet of tying it with a drive to center. Jorge Mateo — a shortstop making only his second start of the year in center field — couldn't catch it, and the ball bounced off the wall for a very long single.

Tucker then battled Bautista for nine pitches, finally hitting a 100 mph fastball to right-center field for his 20th home run of the year. Bautista had allowed

only five earned runs all season before Houston scored four on him in two-thirds of an inning.

Ryne Stanek (3-1) won in relief, and Ryan Pressly pitched a perfect ninth for his 27th save in 31 chances.

Baltimore's lead over Tampa Bay atop the AL East dropped to two games.

Rangers 6, Athletics 1: Max Scherzer gave up three hits in seven innings and visiting Texas beat Oakland, extending its longest winning streak in seven years to eight games.

Braves 8, Pirates 6: Orlando Arcia hit a two-out, two-run double in the ninth, and visiting Atlanta rallied from three runs down to beat Pittsburgh.

Mariners 2, Padres 0: Logan Gilbert struck out a career-high 12 in seven innings of one-hit ball and host Seattle won its sixth straight.

Cubs 3, Mets 2: Mike Tauchman hit a tiebreaking homer in the eighth inning off Drew Smith (4-4) and Jameson Taillon retired his final 16 batters to win his fourth straight start as

visiting Chicago beat New York.

Rockies 7, Brewers 3: Milwaukee's Andrew Chafin and Abner Uribe combined for three straight bases-loaded walks in the 10th inning and handed visiting Colorado the victory.

Rays 4, Cardinals 2: Yandy Díaz, Brandon Lowe and Randy Arozarena hit RBI singles in the eighth inning and host Tampa Bay beat St. Louis.

Guardians 1, Blue Jays 0: Tanner Bibee pitched seven innings and Ramón Laureano drove in the game's only run in his debut for host Cleveland, which ended Toronto's four-game winning streak.

Marlins 3, Reds 2: Jorge Soler hit a two-run homer in the seventh inning and visiting Miami rallied past Cincinnati in a matchup of NL wild-card contenders.

Angels 7, Giants 5: Brandon Drury had three hits and Lucas Giolito picked up his first win for host Los Angeles, which stopped a seven-game skid.

Dodgers 5, Diamondbacks

4: Freddie Freeman had three hits, Julio Urias threw six solid innings and visiting Los Angeles held on to beat fading Arizona.

Yankees 7, White Sox 1: Aaron Judge and Kyle Higashioka homered and visiting New York beat Chicago.

Phillies 8-4, Nationals 4-5: Joey Meneses' second homer of the game was a solo shot off Philadelphia All-Star closer Craig Kimbrel (6-3) in the ninth inning that gave visiting Washington a doubleheader split.

In the opener, Philadelphia's Kyle Schwarber homered twice off Washington's Trevor Williams (5-7) to reach 30 for the season and drove in five runs.

Tigers 6, Twins 0: Eduardo Rodriguez pitched seven solid innings and host Detroit stopped Minnesota's five-game winning streak.

Royals 9, Red Sox 3: Drew Waters, MJ Melendez and Michael Massey each hit two-run home runs and visiting Kansas City beat Boston to snap a three-game skid.

Elliott short on time to earn NASCAR playoff spot

Associated Press

BROOKLYN, Mich. — Chase Elliott is running out of time.

The 2020 NASCAR Cup Series champion, whose year was stunted by a snowboarding accident and hindered by a suspension, needs to win one of the next three races to earn a spot in the playoffs.

"It's the only option," he acknowledged.

On a short week, the series shifts to the road course at Indianapolis Motor Speedway for the Verizon 200 on Sunday before the regular season closes with races at Watkins Glen and Daytona.

Elliott lasted just 34 laps in the FireKeepers 400 at Michigan, where Chris Buescher won his

second straight race on Monday, because a tire failure sent his car into the wall.

"Add it to the list," he said.

The Hendrick Motorsports star had a setback in March when he had surgery on his left leg after a snowboarding accident in Colorado, knocking him out of the Pennzoil 400 in Las Vegas days later and the next five races. After coming back, NASCAR suspended him for one race after it determined he deliberately wrecked Denny Hamlin in the Coca-Cola 600.

The missed races, and some shaky performances have put the fans' five-time choice as NASCAR's most popular driver in a precarious position for the playoffs.

Elliott is 22nd in points, 55 out of the 16th and final spot, and with four spots available in the 16-car postseason, he needs to win to get in along with the 12 playoff-eligible winners this year.

Kevin Harvick and Brad Keselowski are fifth and eighth in the standings, giving them relatively secure spots even if they don't win one of the final three races in the regular season. Bubba Wallace, who is 14th, and rookie Ty Gibbs (16th) are on the bubble.

Michael McDowell, Daniel Suarez, AJ Allmendinger, Alex Bowman and Austin Cindric have a shot, but like Elliott they likely have to win before the regular season ends Aug. 26 at Day-

tona.

"If Daytona wasn't already a madhouse, you can only imagine it now that you have all these prestigious drivers that are just below the cut line, going to lay it all out," said Keselowski, a driver and part-owner for RFK Racing.

TV ratings dipped when Elliott was out and NASCAR would undoubtedly like a postseason with him in it.

Elliott, who is from Dawsonville, Ga., has been in the Hendrick organization since he was 15 when he signed a development deal and quickly made his way into the Cup Series. He has qualified for the playoffs in each of his first seven seasons, winning it all three years ago and finishing fourth the last two years.