

Study: Academies must stop toxic practices

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military academies must improve their leadership, stop toxic practices such as hazing and shift behavior training into the classrooms, according to a Pentagon study aimed at addressing an alarming spike in sexual assaults and misconduct.

U.S. officials said the academies must train student leaders better to help their classmates, and upend what has been a disconnect between what the cadets and midshipmen are learning in school and the often negative and unpunished behavior they see by those mentors. The review calls for additional senior officers and enlisted leaders to work with students at the Army, Navy and Air Force academies and provide the expanded training.

Several U.S. officials described the report on condition of anonymity because it has not yet been publicly released. They said that too often discus-

sions about stress relief, misconduct, social media and other life issues take place after hours or on the weekends. The report recommends that those topics be addressed in classes and graded, to promote their importance.

The study comes on the heels of a report this year that showed a sharp spike in reported sexual assaults at the academies during the 2021-22 school year. It said that one in five female students said in an anonymous survey that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact. The survey results were the highest since the Defense Department began collecting that data many years ago.

Student-reported assaults at the academies jumped 18% overall compared with the previous year, fueled in part by the Navy, which had nearly double the number in 2022, compared with 2021. The anonymous survey accompanying the report found increases in all types of

unwanted sexual contact — from touching to rape — at all the schools. And it cited alcohol as a key factor.

In response to the spike in assaults, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered on-site evaluations at the U.S. Naval Academy in Maryland, the Air Force Academy in Colorado and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in New York, to explore the issues and identify solutions.

The new report, released Thursday, makes several immediate and longer-term recommendations to improve assault and harassment prevention and eliminate toxic climates that fuel the problems. Austin is ordering quick implementation of the changes.

In a memo, Austin acknowledges that the academies “have far more work to do to halt sexual assault and harassment.” He says the increase in assaults and harassment “is disturbing and unacceptable. It endangers

our teammates and degrades our readiness.”

Officials familiar with the study said that while the academies offer a lot of strong programs, toxic and unhealthy command climates make them less effective.

When cadets and midshipmen learn one thing about leadership or prevention in the classroom, but they don’t see it reinforced in other settings, it sends mixed messages about what to expect, about how to be treated and how to treat others, said one official.

Such mixed messages, they said, create cynicism and distrust.

The officials pointed to the Air Force Academy’s longstanding system that treats freshmen differently and badly, promoting hazing and an unhealthy climate.

They said those students may leave the academy with a poor sense of what good leadership looks like.

US Air Force eyes blended-wing body prototype jet

Associated Press

The U.S. Air Force will invest \$235 million to help a start-up manufacturer build a jet with a blended-wing body that officials say could provide greater range and efficiency for military tankers and cargo planes and perhaps eventually be used to carry airline passengers.

JetZero and the Air Force, which announced the award Wednesday, say they hope that the full-size demonstrator plane will be ready to fly in 2027.

Most large airplanes are tubes with wings and a tail section attached. Blended-wing planes are designed with the body and wings being one piece. The result is a sleek, futuristic-looking aircraft with less aerodynamic drag than a conventional plane of the

same size.

JetZero officials argue that traditional planes are running out of ways to improve fuel efficiency, and, with fuel prices likely to rise, an entirely new design is needed to reduce fuel consumption and emissions.

The Air Force, the Pentagon’s Defense Innovation Unit and NASA are working on the project. JetZero has a partner in defense contractor Northrop Grumman.

The idea of a blended-wing body is not new. Boeing built and tested reduced-scale samples of its X-48. Lockheed Martin has tested a Hybrid Wing Body design in wind tunnels.

The Air Force said technology advancements in materials and manufacturing have made the production of larger-scale demon-

strators possible.

At a briefing Wednesday, officials said the JetZero demonstrator could determine whether a blended-wing body could be used in future refueling tankers and cargo planes for the Air Force. They said passenger and cargo airlines could also benefit if the design adds seating or cargo space and reduces fuel costs.

“The commercial industry is thirsty for solutions that aren’t so thirsty for fuel,” said Tom O’Leary, the CEO and co-founder of JetZero, which is based in Los Angeles.

O’Leary acknowledged that the Air Force award will not be enough to cover the development and production of even a single full-scale prototype, but he gave few details on the company’s funding.

No signs of solution for DOD, Tuberville

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The standoff between Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Sen. Tommy Tuberville, the Alabama Republican who has held up hundreds of senior military promotions for months in protest of the Pentagon's abortion access policies, showed no signs of abating Wednesday.

The Pentagon's deputy spokeswoman Sabrina Singh said Tuesday that there was "no" chance of the Pentagon changing a policy that provides paid leave and travel expense reimbursement for service members who need to cross state lines to obtain reproductive health care, including abortions.

"We've been very clear we don't have anything to negotiate with here," Singh said. "[Sen. Tuberville] really has the power ... and his party has the power to end these holds, and we would urge him to do that."

On Wednesday, Tuberville's office countered that the onus is on Austin to end a confirmation blockade of senior generals and admirals that has dragged into a sixth month. Tuberville has refused to consent to a unanimous voice vote in the Senate to confirm military nominees unless Austin rescinds the reproductive health policy.

"Secretary Austin could end the holds today if he wanted to," said Steven Stafford,

the senator's communications director. "But the Biden administration seems to think that illegally spending taxpayer dollars on abortion is more important than getting their senior military nominees confirmed. That is the tradeoff that Secretary Austin has made every single day since this started."

The impasse has prevented 301 senior military officers from being confirmed, including the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, chief of staff of the Army, commandant of the Marine Corps and chief of naval operations. Another 300 positions, including three-quarters of generals and admirals, are expected to become ensnared in Tuberville's hold if it continues through the end of the year.

Singh on Tuesday noted the effects of the blockade are now being felt "right in Sen. Tuberville's backyard." A rear admiral at Redstone Arsenal, a center for Army missile programs located in Tuberville's home state of Alabama, is temporarily filling in as acting director of the Missile Defense Agency — a job that is supposed to be handled by a three-star general.

"You should ask Sen. Tuberville" how the situation ends, Singh told reporters. "We've certainly asked him how this ends."

Austin has talked to Tuberville several

times to attempt to resolve the standoff, she said. The Defense Department also has periodically briefed the Senate Armed Services Committee, of which Tuberville is a member, to explain why the Pentagon needed to act after the Supreme Court last year overturned the constitutional right to an abortion.

"If you are a service member stationed in a state that has rolled back or restricted health care access, you are often stationed there because you were assigned there. It is not that you chose to go there," Singh said. "So, a service member in Alabama deserves to have the same access to health care as a service member in California, as a service member stationed in Korea."

Austin, former defense secretaries and others have warned Tuberville's hold is hurting military readiness and recruiting at a time of great global instability triggered by Russia's war against Ukraine and China's rising military dominance. But Tuberville has pushed back against those claims.

"Contrary to false reporting, no jobs are going unfilled while the hold is in place. Instead, highly experienced acting officials are serving in these roles," said Stafford. "Time and again, military leaders have assured Coach that our military remains ready to fight and to win."

Top enlisted Marine fired from School of Infantry

By DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Marine Corps has dismissed the top enlisted adviser at one of its two basic infantry training schools because the service has lost confidence in his leadership, officials said.

Sgt. Maj. Steven Burkett, who has been the top noncommissioned officer at the Marine Corps' School of Infantry-West for a little more than a year, was removed from the position last month, according to a Marine spokesperson.

"Burkett was formally relieved by the commanding officer of the School of Infantry-West ... for a loss of trust and

confidence in his ability to perform his duties as the command sergeant major," said Maj. Joshua Pena, a spokesman for Marine Corps Training Command, which oversees the school. "A preliminary inquiry was conducted into the matter. There is no additional information available at this time."

Pena said Col. Seth MacCutcheon, commander of the School of Infantry-West at Camp Pendleton near San Diego, relieved Burkett of his duties on July 13. Sgt. Maj. Joseph Powers has taken over as Burkett's interim successor. At the school, Burkett was its top enlisted Marine and MacCutcheon's top NCO adviser. Burkett

wrote on his LinkedIn webpage that he "functioned as the operations director for the Marine Corps' largest school" and "guided the educational pathways of more than 1,000 Marines."

Burkett is a longtime NCO in the Marine Corps, having joined the service in 1994. During his time in the military, he was deployed to several countries, including Iraq and Turkey. In the late 1990s, he was a guard at the U.S. Embassy in Paris. In April, Burkett won the title of Male Marine Athlete of the Year at Camp Pendleton and holds a world record for heaviest weight lifted in a kettlebell swing in one hour.

The achievement and related content that he posted to the social media platform Instagram earned him the nickname "Sergeant Major Kettlebell" at the Southern California base.

"I deployed to Iraq in 2017 and brought a single 53-pound kettlebell with me. I began training with it every single day during the deployment and learned a lot about functional movement and kettlebell basics on my own," Burkett told Military Families magazine in June.

The School of Infantry-West is one of two schools where new Marines must go for the second stage of initial military education after they finish recruit training.

Hawaii vows to protect Maui landowners

Associated Press

LAHAINA, Hawaii — Hawaii's governor vowed to protect local landowners from being "victimized" by opportunistic buyers when Maui rebuilds from deadly wildfires that incinerated a historic island community and killed more than 100 people.

Gov. Josh Green said Wednesday that he instructed the state attorney general to work toward a moratorium on land transactions in Lahaina, even as he acknowledged the move would likely face legal challenges.

"My intention from start to finish is to make sure that no one is victimized from a land grab," Green said at a news conference. "People are right now traumatized. Please do not approach them with an offer to buy their land. Do not approach their families saying they'll be much better off if

they make a deal. Because we're not going to allow it."

Since flames consumed much of Lahaina just over week ago, locals have feared that a rebuilt town could become even more oriented toward wealthy visitors, according to Lahaina native Richy Palalay.

Hotels and condos "that we can't afford to live in—that's what we're afraid of," he said Saturday at a shelter for evacuees.

As the death toll rose to 111 on Wednesday, the head of the Maui Emergency Management Agency defended not sounding sirens during the fire. Hawaii has what it touts as the largest system of outdoor alert sirens in the world.

"We were afraid that people would have gone mauka," said agency administrator Herman Andaya, using a navigational term

that can mean toward the mountains or inland in Hawaiian. "If that was the case, then they would have gone into the fire."

The system was created after a 1946 tsunami that killed more than 150 on the Big Island, and its website says they may be used to alert for fires.

Avery Dagupion, whose family's home was destroyed, said he's angry that residents weren't given earlier warning to get out.

He pointed to an announcement by Maui Mayor Richard Bissen on Aug. 8 saying the fire had been contained. That lulled people into a sense of safety and left him distrusting officials, he said.

At the news conference, Green and Bissen bristled when asked about such criticism.

Study finds more deaths in US related to hurricanes

Associated Press

Hurricanes in the U.S. the last few decades killed thousands more people than meteorologists traditionally calculate and a disproportionate number of those victims are poor, vulnerable and minorities, according to a new epidemiological study.

A team of public health and storm experts calculated that from 1988 to 2019 over 18,000 people likely died, mostly indirectly, because of hurricanes and lesser tropical cyclones in the continental United States. That's 13 times more than the 1,385 people directly killed by storms that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration figures, but the study authors said those numbers aren't directly comparable.

Instead of just looking at people who

drowned, were hit by debris or killed directly by the storm, the study in Wednesday's journal *Science Advances* examines changes in a storm-hit county's overall number of deaths just before, during and after a hurricane and compared those to normal years. Researchers attributed the excess deaths to the storm, using a standard public health technique.

"It's the difference between how many people died and how many people would have died on a normal day" with no hurricane, said study lead author Robbie Parks, an environmental epidemiologist at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health.

After a storm, deaths spike because of heart and lung problems, infections, injury and mental health issues, Parks said.

It's a stressful time with cleanup and rebuilding.

Parks said meteorologists do an admirable job counting people killed during the height of the storm, but so many people die indirectly and especially after the storm, he said "it does seem to be an undercount" that misses the poorest and most vulnerable Americans.

Using the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention's social vulnerability index, Parks divided American counties into the least vulnerable third, the most vulnerable third and the middle, categories that often correlate with the richest, poorest and middle income people. In the case of the heaviest hurricane winds, the most vulnerable third had 57% of the excess deaths and least vulnerable had 6%.

Jobless claims applications in US fell again last week

Associated Press

The U.S. labor market continues to flex its muscle as applications for jobless claims fell again last week and remain at healthy levels in the face of high interest rates and inflation.

Applications for unemployment benefits dropped by 11,000 to 239,000 for the week ending Aug. 12, down from 250,000 the previous week, the Labor Department reported Thursday.

The four-week moving average of claims,

which softens some of the week-to-week volatility, rose by 2,750 to 234,250.

Jobless claim applications are seen as a proxy for the number of layoffs in a given week.

Troubling levels of inflation moved the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates at a breakneck pace for the past year-and-a-half: the central bank raised its benchmark rate 11 times to the current 5.4%, a 22-year high.

Part of the Fed's reasoning was to cool the

job market and bring down wages, which, in theory, suppresses price growth. Though inflation has come down significantly during that stretch, the job market has remained remarkably strong.

Early this month, the Labor Department reported that U.S. employers added 187,000 jobs in July, fewer than expected, but still a solid number. The unemployment rate dipped to 3.5%, close to a half-century low.

Job openings in June fell below 9.6 million, the fewest in more than two years.

Appeals court OKs limits on abortion drug

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Mail-order access to a drug used in the most common form of abortion in the U.S. would end under a federal appeals court ruling issued Wednesday that cannot take effect until the Supreme Court weighs in.

The decision by three judges on the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans overturned part of a lower court ruling that would have revoked the Food and Drug Administration's 23-year-old approval of mifepristone. But it left intact part of the ruling that would end the availability of the drug by mail, allow it to be used through only the seventh week of pregnancy rather than the 10th, and require that it be administered in the presence of a physician.

Those restrictions won't take effect right away because the Su-

preme Court previously intervened to keep the drug available during the legal fight.

The panel's ruling would reverse changes the FDA made in 2016 and 2021 that eased some conditions for administering the drug.

"In loosening mifepristone's safety restrictions, FDA failed to address several important concerns about whether the drug would be safe for the women who use it," Judge Jennifer Walker Elrod wrote for the panel. She was joined by Judge Cory Wilson. Judge James Ho dissented, arguing to fully uphold a Texas-based federal judge's April ruling that would revoke the drug's approval, which the FDA granted in 2000.

President Joe Biden's administration said it would appeal, with Vice President Kamala Harris decrying the potential ef-

fect on abortion rights, as well as on the availability of other medications.

"It endangers our entire system of drug approval and regulation by undermining the independent, expert judgment of the FDA," Harris' statement said.

Abortion rights advocates said the ruling poses a major threat to abortion availability following last year's Supreme Court ruling that overturned *Roe v. Wade* and the nationwide right to abortion.

"If the Supreme Court affirms this decision, it will prevent patients from receiving their medication in the mail in all 50 states in the nation," Jennifer Dalven of the American Civil Liberties Union said during an online news conference.

"That means that patients will have to travel often hundreds of miles, especially if they're coming from a state that has banned

abortion, for the sole purpose of picking up a pill."

Abortion opponents hailed the ruling, although they, too, might appeal to seek full revocation of the FDA's approval of the drug.

"Chemical Abortion Pills take one life almost every time, an innocent child, and exposes women to all kinds of known problems," said a statement from the anti-abortion Students for Life of America.

Erin Hawley, an attorney for the Alliance Defending Freedom, which filed the Texas lawsuit, said her organization had not yet decided whether to appeal to the Supreme Court to try to get mifepristone's approval fully revoked. The conservative Christian legal group was also involved in the Mississippi case that led to the June 2002 Supreme Court ruling that has allowed states to ban abortion.

Gender-affirming care ban for NC minors takes effect

AP/Report for America

RALEIGH, N.C. — Transgender youth in North Carolina lost access Wednesday to gender-affirming medical treatments after the Republican-led General Assembly overrode the governor's vetoes of that legislation and other bills touching on gender in sports and LGBTQ+ instruction in the classroom.

GOP supermajorities in the House and Senate enacted — over Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's opposition — a bill barring medical professionals from providing hormone therapy, puberty-blocking drugs and surgical gender-transition procedures to anyone under 18, with limited exceptions.

The law takes effect immediately. But minors who had begun treatment before Aug. 1 may continue receiving that care if their doctors deem it medically necessary and their parents consent.

North Carolina becomes the 22nd state to enact legislation restricting or banning gender-affirming medical care for transgender minors. But most face legal challenge. The Senate voted 27-18 to complete the veto override after the House voted 74-45 earlier.

Earlier, the Senate and House voted minutes apart to override another veto of a bill limiting LGBTQ+ instruction in the early grades. The law now requires that public school teachers in most circumstances alert parents before they call a student by a different name or pronoun. It also bans instruction about gender identity and sexuality in K-4 classrooms.

Both chambers also voted Wednesday to override Cooper's veto of another bill banning transgender girls from playing on girls' sports teams from middle and high school through college. It, too, immediately became law.

Plea talks could mean no 9/11 defendants face death penalty, US says

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The suspected architect of the 9/11 attacks and his fellow defendants may never face the death penalty under plea agreements now under consideration to bring an end to their more than decadelong prosecution, the Pentagon and FBI have advised families of some of the thousands killed.

The notice, made in a letter that was sent to several of the families and obtained by The Associated Press, comes 1½ years after military prosecutors and defense lawyers began exploring a negotiated resolution to the case. The prosecution of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and four others held at the U.S. detention center in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, has been troubled by delays and legal disputes, especially over the legal ramifications

of the interrogation under torture that the men underwent while in CIA custody. No trial date has been set.

"The Office of the Chief Prosecutor has been negotiating and is considering entering into pre-trial agreements," or PTAs, the letter said. It told the families that while no plea agreement "has been finalized, and may never be finalized, it is possible that a PTA in this case would remove the possibility of the death penalty."

Some relatives of the nearly 3,000 people killed outright in the attacks expressed outrage over the prospect of ending the case short of a verdict. Military prosecutors pledged to take their views into consideration and present them to the military authorities who would make the final decision on any plea agreement.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Explosive material led to deadly house blast

NJ BUENA — A house fire and explosion in New Jersey that killed two men and two young children earlier this month was caused by explosive materials found in the residence, authorities announced Tuesday.

The report issued by the Franklin Township police department also said gas utilities have been ruled out as being “an attributable factor” for the Aug. 3 fire in Buena. It said hundreds of pounds of chemicals and other materials found on the property are consistent with the production of commercial-grade fireworks, but it did not say if that was being done at the home.

Among the materials found inside a vehicle on the property were 74 pounds of potassium nitrate, 15 pounds of aluminum powder, six pounds of magnesium and about 12 pounds of homemade aerial shells. Investigators also found 50.5 pounds of dark metals they could not identify. Other materials found in the home included 58 pounds of ammonium nitrate, 30 pounds of aluminum powder and 26 pounds of sodium salicylate. Four bodies were found in the rubble of the home.

Company asks judge to block cannabis licenses

AL MONTGOMERY — A company that failed to win a potentially lucrative medical marijuana license in Alabama asked a judge Tuesday to block the state from issuing the licenses to anyone, arguing a state commission improperly deliberated in private before se-

lecting the winners.

The filing is the latest legal skirmish in the battle over who will get licenses to grow and distribute cannabis for the state’s developing medical marijuana program.

The Alabama Medical Cannabis Commission last week nominated and approved companies after meeting in private for several hours. Alabama Always, a company that was not among the winners, said the commission violated the Open Meetings Act, and is seeking a temporary restraining order to block the licenses from being issued.

The filing said commissioners “retreated into executive session, only to emerge three-and-a-half hours later and ratify a slate of applicants that it had voted on during executive session.”

Sixth person dies from injuries in house blast

PA PLUM — The co-owner of a home that exploded in western Pennsylvania last weekend has died from injuries he suffered in the blast, which also killed his wife and four other people.

Paul Oravitz, 56, who had severe burns over most of his body, died Wednesday in a Pittsburgh hospital, four days after the explosion in Plum. The town is about 20 miles east of Pittsburgh.

The cause of the blast — which destroyed three structures and damaged at least a dozen others — remains under investigation, but officials have said Oravitz and his wife, Heather, were having issues with their hot water tank.

The explosion occurred

shortly before 10:30 a.m. Saturday. Heather Oravitz, 51, who was Plum’s community development director, was killed in the blast along with Plum Borough Manager Michael Thomas, 57, and three others who lived in the neighborhood: Kevin Sebulina, 55; Casey Clontz, 38; and Clontz’s 12-year-old son, Keegan.

State won’t discuss Tulsa race settlement

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — Oklahoma says it won’t discuss a settlement with survivors who are seeking reparations for the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre and have appealed a Tulsa County judge’s dismissal of the case last month.

The Oklahoma Supreme Court has agreed to consider the survivors’ appeal, and the state attorney general’s litigation division filed its response Monday.

There are just three known survivors of the attack still living, all of them more than 100 years old. Lessie Benningfield Randle, Viola Fletcher and Hughes Van Ellis have sued for reparations from the city, state and others for the white mob’s destruction of the once-thriving Black district known as Greenwood. Several other original plaintiffs who are descendants of survivors were dismissed from the case by the trial court judge last year.

Kitten turns up in stolen car involved in chase

CT MERIDEN — Police who were examining a stolen car for evidence made a surprising find — a kitten — and

now they are looking for his owner.

The gray-and-white male cat was perched under a seat in the stolen vehicle, which collided with a police car during a chase Thursday, the Meriden Police Department said on its Facebook page and in a news release Monday.

Officers were pursuing the car on suspicion it had been used in armed robberies in several nearby communities hours earlier. After the crash, six suspects fled but were soon arrested.

Professor charged with stealing rare jewelry

NY NEW YORK — A retired political science professor who traveled in Washington’s elite social circles pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to charges that he stole tens of thousands of dollars in jewelry from his wealthy acquaintances.

Lawrence Gray sold at least seven rare and valuable stolen items, including diamond earrings, a pink sapphire brooch and a 19th century gold pocket watch, prosecutors said. They allege he earned more than \$45,000 consigning the pieces to a Manhattan auction house.

Gray, 79, pleaded not guilty in a Manhattan criminal court to charges of grand larceny, criminal possession of stolen property and a scheme to defraud. Wearing a pink shirt and black blazer and leaning gingerly on a dark wooden cane, he declined to speak to reporters as he left the courtroom. He was released without bail after agreeing to give up his passport.

— From wire reports

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Seminoles' returning stars welcome expectations

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Mike Norvell grabs an ice-cold bottle of water, squeezes some into his mouth and then pours the rest down his back.

It turns the Florida State coach's sweat-soaked T-shirt into his personal cool zone, at least for a few minutes. The respite from the sweltering summer sun is short-lived — exactly how Norvell wants it for the Seminoles.

The hotter the better during his team's three-day, training-camp trip to Jacksonville. It's the perfect metaphor for the intensity and scrutiny the 'Noles expect this season.

"You're not going to be comfortable in life," quarterback Jordan Travis said. "You got to be comfortable being uncomfortable. That's what we're focused on."

The program's most anticipated campaign in nearly a decade begins in three weeks against Southeastern Conference heavy-weight LSU in the Camping World Kickoff in Orlando. The primetime matchup between top-10 teams will provide an early glimpse into two championship contenders. Florida State is ranked eighth in the Associated Press preseason Top 25, while the Tigers are fifth.

For FSU, getting to this point happened slowly, then suddenly.

The Seminoles went 8-13 in Norvell's first two seasons, those coming on the heels of the Willie Taggart debacle. They were embarrassed by Miami, Louisville and Pittsburgh in COVID-altered 2020 and then raised eyebrows with a stunning loss to lower-division Jacksonville State in 2021.

To outsiders, FSU was a shell of its former self. The program that finished in the top five in 14 consecutive seasons (1987-2000) under legend Bobby Bowden and then won a third national championship with coach Jimbo Fisher and Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Jameis Winston in 2013 looked lost.

Behind the scenes, though, Norvell was navigating the changing landscape of college football as well as anyone. Simply put, he crushed the transfer portal — 16 of the team's 22 projected starters for this season came from other schools.

Not all of them were plug-and-play stars, either. Travis (Louisville), receiver Johnny Wilson (Arizona State), running back Trey Benson (Oregon) and nose tackle Fabien Lovett (Mississippi State) made huge strides under Norvell and his staff.

Making the group even more special: most of them, including All-Atlantic Coast Conference edge rusher Jared Verse (Albany), returned to school in hopes of winning it all. They enter this season with a six-game winning streak, the fifth longest in Division I, but currently are 2½-point underdogs against the Tigers.

"We just knew we had unfinished business," Travis said. "We all came back. We have goals and expectations for this football team."

"It was big for everything. ... All of us coming back, it brings confidence back to this football team, a lot of experience."

Verse, widely considered a first-round NFL talent, looked like he would be a one-and-done transfer and jump to the draft after 16½ tackles for loss in 2022. But he and his fellow draft-eligible teammates wanted more.

"It's huge; guys that want to be here," Norvell said. "They're bought into what we're doing as a program and they also believe that they're going to develop. These guys are great players that have had really good success throughout their career, but they want to take another step."

"And I've been really pleased with the work ethic, the desire. That's encouraging to every-

body. You get one chance for a career. ... They all have big dreams and big goals, but they see this as a great step to where they want to ultimately get to."

A stay in Jacksonville was part of the journey.

The Seminoles arrived at the University of North Florida on Wednesday evening for their annual three-day camp that includes dorm-style sleeping arrangements, countless team events and two practices in stifling heat and humidity.

The school has one portable mast cam, prompting the use of two droids to capture practice video.

The footage no doubt shows a talented team — several NFL scouts were on hand Thursday and Friday to gain up-close looks at next-level players — and its most depth since Fisher's teams won 29 consecutive games before losing to Oregon in a 2014 CFP semifinal.

"Everybody in the country right now is talking about wanting to achieve great things," Norvell said. "You got to work for great things. ... This team has trained and this team cares about each other. We've got great players, we've got a wonderful staff, but they believe in each other and they've built trust."

Chargers' Nigerian DL Okoye records sack in first game

Associated Press

COSTA MESA, Calif. — Imagine never having played cricket before and then taking a wicket in an Indian Premier League match your first time out, or never seeing a rugby match in person and scoring a try in Australia's National Rugby League.

That might give you a better understanding of what CJ Okoye did Saturday night.

The 21-year-old defensive lineman from Nigeria recorded a sack in his first organized football game at any level during the Los Angeles Chargers' 34-17 victory over the Rams. Okoye chased down Stetson Bennett for a 16-yard loss late in the fourth quarter.

"It was an amazing moment for me,"

Okoye said. "It was amazing seeing my teammates and my D-line room go crazy like that. I wish to go back there again."

Okoye came to the Chargers this year through the NFL's International Pathway Program, which was established in 2017 to increase the number of international players in the league. While he had shown enough to be allocated to an NFL team, he hadn't played organized football before.

Okoye didn't even know he recorded a sack until a teammate told him. He broke out his version of a sack dance as the Chargers sideline celebrated the moment.

Okoye also received a game ball from coach Brandon Staley in the locker room after the game.

"Just to see how he's been working, it brought me back to when I first started playing and was kind of green to the game, back in my senior year of high school," offensive guard Zion Johnson said. "Those moments are what craft you and push you forward to want to become a better player."

The sack was even more impressive because it didn't come on a straight rush, but a stunt. Bennett eluded pressure from defensive tackle Jerrod Clark in the pocket before Okoye chased him down.

"It was the play we normally run, so we just need to run and twist," Okoye said. "We communicated, and (Clark) said, 'I'm going in. You just wrap around.' He did a good job. I just needed to finish it."

Andonovski resigns after early US exit

Associated Press

Twila Kilgore will serve as interim coach of the U.S. women's national soccer team following the resignation of coach Vlatko Andonovski, the U.S. Soccer Federation announced on Thursday.

Kilgore, the first American-born woman to earn U.S. Soccer's top-level Pro License, was an assistant under Andonovski for 1½ years and will lead the team while a search for a permanent coach is conducted.

Andonovski's resignation comes less than two weeks after the United States was knocked out of the Women's World Cup earlier than ever before.

"While we are all disappointed by the outcome at this year's World Cup, I am immensely proud of the progress this team has made, the support they've shown for each other, and the inspiration they've provided for players around the world. I will be forever thankful to the U.S. Soccer Federation for giving me the chance to coach this remarkable team," Andonovski

said in a statement.

Previously, Kilgore was an assistant coach with the Houston Dash in the National Women's Soccer League and worked with numerous U.S. youth women's national teams. She's spent 15 years in the college game, as a head coach at UC-Davis and an assistant at Pepperdine before landing the top job there.

Kilgore will lead the U.S. team in a pair of exhibition matches against South Africa on Sept. 21 in Cincinnati and on Sept. 24 in Chicago.

The four-time tournament champions struggled throughout the World Cup. A victory over Vietnam to kick off the group stage was followed by a pair of draws against the Netherlands and Portugal — barely enough to get the team into the knockout stage.

The Americans played well in the round of 16 against Sweden, but ultimately fell on penalties after a scoreless tie. The U.S. scored just four goals over the course of the tournament. The U.S. had never finished worse

than third at the World Cup.

U.S. Soccer Sporting Director Matt Crocker, appointed to the job in April, will lead the search for a new coach. Crocker has launched an in-depth analysis of the women's program aimed at ensuring the team remains competitive.

"It's imperative that we continue to evolve and innovate, and we are excited about the path that lies ahead," Crocker said in a statement. "We understand the challenges and have engaged with stakeholders from various corners of our sport — players, coaches, and other individuals within the soccer landscape. The insights and perspectives gathered during these discussions have been instrumental in shaping our forward-looking plan."

The 46-year-old Andonovski was named coach of the U.S. in October 2019, taking over for Jill Ellis, who led the U.S. to back-to-back World Cup titles. He finished 51-5-9 during his time with the team and was 3-2-5 in major tournaments.

"We want to extend our deepest gratitude to Vlatko for his dedication to the Women's National Team," U.S. Soccer president Cindy Parlow Cone said in a press release. "We know he will continue to contribute to the growth of the women's game in the United States and wish him well in his future endeavors."

The U.S. also finished with a disappointing bronze medal at the Tokyo Olympics. Afterward, Andonovski turned his attention to developing young players ahead of the World Cup. Some of the players who emerged were Sophia Smith and Trinity Rodman.

Fourteen players on the U.S. roster were appearing in their first World Cup, and 12 had never played in a major tournament.

The U.S. was also bitten by injuries in the run-up to the tournament, losing a pair of key players. Mallory Swanson injured her knee during a friendly in April, and captain Becky Sauerbrunn couldn't recover from a foot injury in time.

Bonmati: It's time for another Spanish champion

Associated Press

AUCKLAND, New Zealand — Aitana Bonmati remembers the moment Andres Iniesta scored at the 2010 World Cup clearly, even though she was only 12 years old.

Iniesta's extra-time goal in the championship match against the Netherlands at Johannesburg gave Spain a 1-0 win for its first and only men's World Cup trophy.

Bonmati says it's time for a new Spanish champion, this time at the Women's World Cup. Spain will play England in Sunday's final in Sydney after the Lionesses beat Australia 3-1 in a semifinal Wednesday.

"I hope we can repeat the history with our team," Bonmati said.

Spain advanced to the final with a 2-1 victory over Sweden on Tuesday, a game that saw all three goals come in the final 10 minutes.

Bonmati calls Iniesta and teammate Xavi her idols. Iniesta, 39, now plays with Emirates in the UAE Pro League. He celebrated La Roja's victory on social media, proclaiming "Enormous!"

Spain broke through the scoreless stalemate with Sweden in the 81st minute on 19-year-old substitute Salma Paralluelo's goal. Paralluelo, who chose soccer over track and field, also scored the game-winner in extra time over the Netherlands in the quarterfinals.

Sweden's Rebecca Blomqvist tied it Tuesday with a goal in the

89th minute, but moments later Olga Carmona scored the game-winner off a corner from Teresa Abelleira.

Bonmati said the winning goal was something of a surprise, because Spain had not drawn up the play.

"We saw Olga alone out of the box. We are also smart, we are not robots, we have to make decisions quick," she said. "I think it was a very good decision... if you make a good decision and then you don't score, it doesn't matter. But it was a very good goal."

Bonmati, 25, has emerged as a versatile young star for La Roja. She had two goals and two assists in Spain's 5-1 rout of Switzerland in the round of 16, and has boosted the team while two-

time Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas continues to work her way back from a ruptured ACL.

La Roja is clearly a team on the rise.

But along with the team's growth has come turmoil.

Last September, 15 players signed letters that said they were withdrawing from the national team to protect their emotional health. The players insisted they did not ask for coach Jorge Vilda's dismissal.

Three of the 15 players who initially stepped down were on the World Cup roster.

Bonmati put aside any suggestion of friction in the team.

"We never give up, and now we believe in ourselves," Bonmati said. "We are a very strong team mentally."

Former Army captain sets sights on gold

BY MATT WAGNER
Stars and Stripes

Kelly Elmlinger heard stories about Olympians and Paralympians pushing themselves even harder after a first taste of competing at the highest level.

The former Army captain said after competing in the Tokyo Paralympics in 2021, she understands that feeling. And she could guarantee herself a spot at the 2024 games in Paris by winning Saturday at a triathlon event in the French capital.

"It is not a wonder why others — whether you're a Paralympian, Olympian — want to continue to do that for another four years to have that same experience," the 44-year-old said in a recent Zoom interview. "Not that I didn't get it before, but now, oh, I really get it."

"I want that feeling again."

The Attica, Ohio, native said the family feel of the paratriathlon group harkens back to her military career. A former medic with the 82nd Airborne Division, she deployed once to Afghanistan and twice to Iraq between 2002 and 2005. Elmlinger also nursed troops with severe combat wounds at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio from 2011 to 2018.

She was diagnosed with synovial sarcoma, a rare, soft-tissue tumor found next to her tibia in 2013. Eventually, it led to her left leg being amputated be-

low the knee.

That didn't stop her from pursuing sports. She played basketball and ran while growing up. After the amputation, she eventually settled on the triathlon, consisting of a 750-meter swim, 20-kilometer bike ride and 5-kilometer run.

The American contingent consists of a mixture of veterans and non-veterans, and Elmlinger said the group is as tight-knit as any.

"Previous to triathlon, I did some sports with some other groups, and it just didn't really click that well," she said. "It didn't really feel like home. It didn't really feel like this is where I'm supposed to be."

"Coming into triathlon, just seeing how close the group was, it was very familiar to how it was in the military, and it was very familiar to the core group of individuals that I had when I deployed so many times."

The 2023 World Triathlon Para Cup Paris course starts at the iconic Pont Alexandre III bridge and includes a stint along the famous Champs-Élysées. It's the same course that will be used at the games.

"I love that mental imagery, I love being able to see myself going through that race many times," Elmlinger said. "I may get to the Paris Games and have done this course two times with practice and the actual race, but

in my head, I've done it thousands of times. For me, that's huge. That's a lot of confidence."

If Elmlinger wins Saturday or during the 2023 World Triathlon Championship Finals in Pontevedra, Spain, on Sept. 23, she will qualify automatically for the games. Even if she doesn't win either event, though, she's currently likely to get a spot.

She's No. 3 on World Triathlon's Paralympic qualifying rankings and the sport's top competitors also generally get invited to the games.

Elmlinger sits in third despite having earned 1,000 points after two races, while the two ahead of her — Great Britain's Hannah Moore (1,099.74) and Germany's Elke Van Engelen (1,035.50) — have three qualifying races during the July 1, 2023, to July 1, 2024, ranking period.

Unlike in Tokyo, crowds are expected to be allowed in Paris. So her daughter Jayden might be able to see her compete in person and celebrate her 16th birthday in the City of Light.

"To be able to have my daughter there, that would be extremely special," Elmlinger said. "She's really been through a lot herself. To be able to take her along and to show her what it's all about, have her get some of those experiences, that's

something I think about all the time."

Elmlinger said she would love to inspire young people, especially those who are facing similar challenges in their lives. And she notes that the recent success of Paralympic events seems to be doing that as well.

Wheelchair athletes have competed at the Ohio High School Athletic Association State Track and Field Championships in the 100, 400 and 800, as well as the shot put, since 2013.

Elmlinger has worked with South Texas Regional Adaptive and Para Sports in San Antonio. STRAPS' mission is to organize, promote and administer adaptive and Paralympic-style sports to wounded service members, veterans, adults and youths.

She said she has seen organizations such as STRAPS grow in recent years, while kids are getting more opportunities to compete in adaptive sports across the United States.

"For them to be able to see adults be successful and a lot of us have families and to live a very normal life, that's the part I want them to take away," Elmlinger said. "Yeah, you can grow up and do whatever you want to do and be successful and have the things you want and the things that you dream of."

Women's 100 is race to watch at world championships

Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary — When she stamped her name on the long, illustrious list of American sprint champions earlier this summer, Sha'Carri Richardson also set the stakes for the year ahead of her and the rest of the fast pack of 100-meter runners she's going against.

"I'm not back. I'm better," she declared.

Whether that is good enough to win gold medals starting this week at the world championships, then again less than 12 months from now at the Paris Olympics,

comes down to whether she can finish in front of defending and five-time world champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and the Jamaican's teammate, Shericka Jackson.

Jackson has the world's best time this year (10.65 seconds), but has lost to Richardson in their only two head-to-head matchups in 2023. Fraser-Pryce is trying to match pole vaulter Sergey Bubka's record for world titles in one individual event. Also in the mix is Marie-Josée Ta Lou of the Ivory Coast, who joins Richardson and Jackson as the three women to crack 10.8 this year.

Two years after being denied a spot in the Olympics after testing positive for marijuana, Richardson will line up at her first major competition when the 100-meter heats start Sunday. The meet itself begins Saturday with the early round of the men's 100, where Fred Kerley defends his title and a strong roster of American runners try to repeat last year's podium sweep.

In many ways, this year's meet is a preview of what to expect when many of the same athletes take to the track at the Stade de France in Paris next year.