

Kremlin's revenge seen in jet crash

Associated Press

Russian mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin and some of his top lieutenants were presumed dead in a plane crash that was widely seen Thursday as an assassination to avenge a mutiny that challenged President Vladimir Putin.

A preliminary U.S. intelligence assessment has found that the plane crash was intentionally caused by an explosion, according to U.S. and Western officials.

One of the officials, who were not authorized to comment and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that the explosion fell in line with Putin's "long history of trying to silence his critics."

Meanwhile, Putin broke his silence on the crash, expressing condolences to the families of those who were reported to be aboard the jet and referring to "serious mistakes" made by Prigozhin.

The founder of the Wagner military company and six other passengers were on a private jet that crashed Wednesday soon after taking off from Moscow with a crew of three, according to Russia's civil aviation authority. Rescuers found 10 bodies, and Russian media cited anonymous sources in Wagner who said Prigozhin was dead. But there has been no official confirmation.

If the deaths are confirmed, the crash

would be the most serious blow the group has ever suffered to its leadership.

The passenger manifest included Prigozhin and his second-in-command who baptized the group with his nom de guerre, as well as Wagner's logistics chief, a fighter wounded by U.S. airstrikes in Syria and at least one possible bodyguard.

It was not clear why several high-ranking members of Wagner, including top leaders who are normally exceedingly careful about their security, were on the same flight. The purpose of their joint trip to St. Petersburg was unknown.

In all, the other passengers included six of Prigozhin's lieutenants, along with the three-member flight crew.

At Wagner's headquarters in St. Petersburg, lights were turned on in the shape of a large cross, and Prigozhin supporters built a makeshift memorial, piling red and white flowers outside the building Thursday, along with company flags and candles.

In his first comments on the crash, Putin said the passengers had "made a significant contribution" to the fighting in Ukraine.

"We remember this, we know, and we will not forget," the president said in a televised interview with the Russian-installed leader of Ukraine's partially occupied Donetsk region, Denis Pushilin.

Putin recalled that he had known Prigozhin since the early 1990s and described him as "a man of difficult fate" who had "made serious mistakes in life, and he achieved the results he needed — both for himself and, when I asked him about it, for the common cause, as in these last months. He was a talented man, a talented businessman."

Russian state media have not covered the crash extensively, instead focusing on Putin's remarks to the BRICS summit in Johannesburg via video link and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Elsewhere, police cordoned off the field where the plane went down in Kuzhenkino, about 185 miles northwest of Moscow, as investigators studied its wreckage. Vehicles took away the bodies.

Several Russian social media channels reported that the bodies were burned or disfigured beyond recognition and would need to be identified by DNA. The reports were picked up by independent Russian media, but The Associated Press was not able to independently confirm them.

Prigozhin supporters claimed on pro-Wagner messaging app channels that the plane was deliberately downed, including suggesting it could have been hit by a missile or targeted by a bomb on board. Those claims could not be independently verified.

Trump changes legal team before surrender in Ga.

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Donald Trump was set to turn himself in Thursday to authorities in Georgia on charges that he illegally schemed to overturn the 2020 election in that state, a county jail booking expected to yield a historic first: a mug shot of a former American president.

Trump's surrender, coming amid an abrupt shake-up of his legal team, follows the presidential debate in Milwaukee the night before featuring his leading rivals for the 2024 Republican nomination — a contest in which he remains the leading candidate despite broad legal troubles. His presence in Georgia, though likely brief, is swiping the spotlight anew from his opponents

after the debate in which they sought to seize on his absence to elevate their own presidential prospects.

The Fulton County prosecution is the fourth criminal case against Trump since March, when he became the first former president in U.S. history to be indicted. Since then, he's faced federal charges in Florida and Washington, and this month he was indicted in Atlanta with 18 others — including his ex-chief of staff, Mark Meadows, and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani — under a racketeering statute normally associated with gang members and organized crime. Giuliani, Trump's lawyer and confidant, turned himself in on Wednesday and had a booking photo taken.

The criminal cases have spurred a succession of bookings and arraignments, with Trump making brief court appearances before returning to the campaign trail. He's turned the appearances into campaign events amid a far lighter schedule than his rivals, with staff delighting in wall-to-wall media coverage that has included news helicopters tracking his every move.

The campaign has also used the appearances to solicit fundraising contributions from his supporters as aides paint the charges as part of a politically motivated effort to damage his reelection chances.

By Thursday afternoon, dozens of Trump supporters had gathered outside the jail where the ex-president was to surrender.

Commander fired after US destroyer struck the bottom

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The guided-missile destroyer USS Howard, whose commander was relieved of duty this month, sustained a “soft grounding” just before arriving in Indonesia for a port call on Aug. 10, according to the U.S. 7th Fleet.

The Yokosuka-based Howard was en route to Bali when watchstanders gave the “initial indication” that the ship had grounded, 7th Fleet spokesman Lt. Luka Bakic told Stars and Stripes by email Thursday.

“Upon indication of potential grounding, watchstanders took immediate action to protect the crew and the ship,” he wrote. “The ship was able to return to normal operations under its own power and propulsion. There were no injuries as a result of the mishap.”

The incident occurred nine days before Vice Adm. Karl Thomas, commander of 7th Fleet, fired the Howard’s skip-

per, Cmdr. Kenji Igawa, on Aug. 19 for a “loss of confidence in his ability to command.”

Bakic would not define a “soft grounding,” nor comment on whether the incident was linked to Igawa being relieved. The spokesman provided no further details about the mishap and emphasized that it is under investigation.

A soft grounding is described elsewhere as one from which a vessel may be freed, even with time or by the actions of wind, wave or tides.

It’s also described as a vessel bottoming on a soft seabed rather than harder features such as rocks.

A soft grounding typically does not involve major damage to the vessel.

Igawa has been replaced on the Howard by Capt. Edward Angelinas, the former commander of the guided-missile cruiser USS Robert Smalls, until a permanent replacement is chosen, the 7th Fleet said in a news release Sunday.

Mother of US soldier in North Korea speaks out

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A U.S. Army private who mysteriously sprinted across the border into North Korea last month has “so many reasons to come home,” his mother said Wednesday as she cast doubt on a recent statement that suggested her son, Travis King, might be seeking refuge there or in a third country.

Claudine Gates spoke to The Associated Press one week after North Korea released the statement through its state media in which it confirmed for the first time that it had detained the soldier and attributed comments to him criticizing the U. S.

“I just can’t see him ever wanting to just stay in Korea when he has family in America. He has so many reasons to come home,” Gates, from Racine, Wis., said.

King, 23, had served in South Korea and sprinted into North Korea while on a civilian tour of a border village on July 18.

The official Korean Central News Agency said King, who is Black, had said he decided to enter North Korea because he “harbored ill feelings against inhuman mistreatment and racial discrimination within the U.S. Army.” The report also

said that King had said he “was disillusioned at the unequal American society” and had expressed his willingness to seek refuge in North Korea or a third country.

U.S. officials last week said they were unable to verify the comments attributed to him, while White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters to “consider the source.”

Gates, in the interview with AP, said she had never heard her son express the sentiments attributed to him.

“My son, he was proud to be American. He’s not even a racist type of person. That’s why I can’t see him saying that,” she said. But she added that “I was kind of told that he said a little something like that to his uncles” and that “their approach with him was a little different than me. I’m mom.”

She noted that in the months before his dash across the border to North Korea, he had become significantly less communicative than in his early days in the Army. Family members have previously said that he may have felt overwhelmed as he faced legal troubles and his possible looming discharge from the military.

Norway plans to donate F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine

Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — NATO-member Norway will donate F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said Thursday, amid Kyiv’s difficult counteroffensive against Russia.

Speaking to Norwegian news agency NTB in Kyiv where he paid a visit on Ukraine’s Independence Day, Gahr Store said

Norway will provide F-16 aircraft to Ukraine but they’ll probably be less than 10.

Gahr Store said he informed Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of the aircraft donation and that Norway would discuss the number of planes as well as the transfer timetable with Kyiv and other allied countries.

Norway would be the third European country after the

Netherlands and Denmark to donate F-16 planes.

Ukraine has long pleaded for the sophisticated fighter jets to give it a combat edge. It recently launched a long-anticipated counteroffensive against the Kremlin’s forces without air cover, placing its troops at the mercy of Russian aviation and artillery.

In February, oil-rich Norway announced that it is donating \$7

billion to Kyiv as part of a five-year support package, making Norway one of the world’s biggest donors to Ukraine.

The money will be split evenly between military and humanitarian assistance over five years, broken down to \$1.4 billion annually.

Gahr Store announced earlier Thursday that Norway would also donate anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine.

GOP candidates line up with Trump at debate

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — The Republican presidential candidates vying to be the leading alternative to front-runner Donald Trump fought — sometimes bitterly — over abortion rights, U.S. support for Ukraine and the type of experience needed to manage an expansive federal government during the first debate of the 2024 campaign.

But when it came to arguably the most consequential choice facing the party, virtually everyone on the debate stage in Milwaukee on Wednesday night lined up behind Trump, who declined to participate, citing his commanding lead. Most said they would support Trump as their nominee even if he is convicted in a series of cases that range from his handling of classified documents to his efforts to

overturn the 2020 election and his role in making hush money payments to a porn actress and other women.

“Let’s just speak the truth,” said tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy. “President Trump, I believe, was the best president of the 21st century. It’s a fact.”

In the face of such an unprecedented moment in American politics, that sentiment was a reminder of the power Trump continues to wield in the party and the reluctance of most GOP White House hopefuls to directly confront him or his norm-breaking activity. And it spoke to the struggle of any single candidate in the crowded field to emerge as a credible counter to Trump with less than five months until the Iowa caucuses formally jump-start the GOP presidential nomination

process.

That challenge was particularly acute for Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who announced his campaign in May to great fanfare but has since struggled to gain traction. He was sometimes eclipsed on Wednesday by lower-polling candidates, including former Vice President Mike Pence, a generally understated politician who demonstrated an aggressive side as he positioned himself as the most experienced candidate on stage.

Pence along with former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie sparred frequently with Ramaswamy. The goal for almost every candidate was to use the event, hosted by Fox News, to displace DeSantis from his distant second-place standing and introduce themselves to viewers who are just tuning into the race.

While the candidates repeatedly tangled — often talking over moderators Bret Baier and Martha MacCallum — most refused to oppose Trump as the nominee, even if he becomes a convicted felon. The question came nearly an hour into the debate and a day before Trump was set to surrender in Georgia on charges of trying to overturn the state’s 2020 election.

Trump, who had long said he felt it would be foolish to participate in the debate given his dominant lead in the race, followed through with his threat to skip the Fox event in a blow to the network. Instead, Trump pre-recorded an interview with ex-Fox host Tucker Carlson that was posted to X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter, right before the debate kicked off.

SC’s all-male high court upholds abortion limits

AP/Report for America

COLUMBIA, S.C. — South Carolina’s newly all-male Supreme Court reversed course on abortion Wednesday, upholding a law banning most such procedures except in the earliest weeks of pregnancy.

The continued erosion of legal abortion access across the U.S. South comes after Republican state lawmakers replaced the lone woman on the court, Justice Kaye Hearn, who reached the state’s mandatory retirement age.

The 4-1 ruling departs from the court’s own decision months earlier striking down a similar ban that the Republican-led Legislature passed in 2021. The latest ban takes effect immediately.

Writing for the new majority, Justice John Kittredge acknowledged that the 2023 law also infringes on “a woman’s right of privacy and bodily autonomy,” but said the state Legislature

reasonably determined this time around that those interests don’t outweigh “the interest of the unborn child to live.”

“As a Court, unless we can say that the balance struck by the Legislature was unreasonable as a matter of law, we must uphold the Act,” Kittredge wrote.

Kittredge wrote that “we leave for another day” a determination on what the law’s language means for when exactly during a pregnancy the ban should begin, likely forecasting another long court fight on that question.

Chief Justice Donald Beatty provided the lone dissent, arguing that the 2023 law is nearly identical, with definitions for terms including “fetal heartbeat” and “conception” that provide no clarity on when the ban begins, exposing doctors to criminal charges if law enforcement disagrees with their expertise.

CIA facing flood of sexual misconduct complaints

Associated Press

FAIRFAX, Va. — In a secluded stairwell at CIA headquarters last year, officer trainee Ashkan Bayatpour came up behind a colleague, wrapped a scarf around her neck and plainly spoke as he tried to kiss her on the mouth.

“There are many uses for this,” the woman recalls him saying. “This is what I want to do to you.”

Bayatpour was convicted Wednesday of a state misdemeanor charge of assault and battery in a case that was remarkable for breaking through the CIA’s veil of ultra-secrecy and playing out in a public courtroom where it has emboldened a sexual misconduct reckoning.

At least 24 women have come forward in recent months with their own complaints of abusive treatment within the CIA, telling authorities and Congress not only about sexual assaults, unwanted touching and coercion, but of

what they have contended is a campaign by the spy agency to keep them from speaking out, with dire warnings it could wreck their careers and even endanger national security.

“There are harassers everywhere and bosses that try to cover them up,” said Kristin Alden, a Washington attorney who represents some of the women who have filed complaints. “But the whole nature of intelligence work — the culture of secrecy and people working under assumed names — really elevates the chilling effect of retaliation and isolation that victims feel.”

Several of the woman’s female co-workers attended Wednesday’s proceedings, becoming emotional after Fairfax General District Court Judge Dipti Pidikiti-Smith found Bayatpour guilty, sentenced him to six months’ probation and ordered him to surrender any firearms and stay away from the woman.

China banning all seafood from Japan

Associated Press

OKUMA, Japan — The tsunami-wrecked Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant began releasing its first batch of treated radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean on Thursday — a controversial step that prompted China to ban seafood from Japan.

People inside and outside the country protested the wastewater release, with Japanese fishing groups fearing it will

further damage the reputation of their seafood and groups in China and South Korea raising concerns, making it a political and diplomatic issue.

In response to the wastewater release, Chinese customs authorities banned seafood from Japan, customs authorities announced.

The ban started immediately and will affect all imports of “aquatic products” including seafood, according to the no-

tice. Authorities said they will “dynamically adjust relevant regulatory measures as appropriate to prevent the risks of nuclear-contaminated water discharge to the health and food safety of our country.”

Shortly after China’s announcement, Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings President Tomoaki Kobayakawa said the utility was preparing to compensate Japanese business owners appropriately for dam-

ages suffered by export bans from “the foreign government” over the wastewater release.

The Japanese government and TEPCO say the water must be released to make room for the plant’s decommissioning and to prevent accidental leaks. They say the treatment and dilution will make the wastewater safer than international standards and its environmental impact will be negligibly small.

Bill aims to protect cadets who report sexual assault

Associated Press

NEW LONDON, Conn. — Bipartisan federal legislation was introduced Tuesday that would protect cadets at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy who report a sexual assault from being disciplined for minor collateral misconduct, such as underage drinking.

The change would put the Connecticut service academy

in line with policies at Department of Defense military academies. The U.S. Coast Guard is overseen by the Department of Homeland Security. The legislation comes amid recent revelations that the service did not widely disclose a six-year internal investigation it conducted, known as Operation Fouled Anchor, into dozens of cases of sexual assault and

misconduct between 1988 and 2006.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney noted in a statement how the Department of Defense “swiftly implemented” a policy change preventing cadets at its service academies from receiving punishment for minor offenses when they report sexual assault or harassment. He said such protections

must be extended to the Coast Guard Academy cadets as well.

“This is one step in the process to care for our cadets as I continue to engage with Coast Guard leadership on the path forward following its failure to disclose the investigation into its history of sexual assault and harassment at the Coast Guard Academy,” said Courtney, the bill’s lead proponent.

One of the 1st Black men in Marine Corps dies at 108

By DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Cosmas D. Eaglin, one of the first Black men to break the color barrier in the Marine Corps in the 1940s and one of the service’s oldest surviving veterans, has died at 108, officials said.

“We owe so much to the brave men and women who have served our armed services and we honor Cosmas Eaglin’s service and memory today,” North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper said. “I am grateful for Mr. Eaglin’s dedication and service to our country.”

Eaglin was a veteran of three American wars between the 1940s and 1960s and was one of the first 300 Black recruits to enter the Marines

after President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941 ordered military service open to people of all races. The first group of Black troops, who were assigned to train at Montford Point near Camp LeJeune in North Carolina, became known as the Montford Point Marines.

After enlisting in the Marine Corps, Eaglin served for two years in the Pacific Theater in the Solomon Islands during World War II. He left the Marines after WWII, but later joined the Army and became a paratrooper during the Korean War in the early 1950s. He also served two tours of duty in the Vietnam War in the 1960s.

“Eaglin leaves a legacy of commitment, integrity and lifelong service,” said Walter Gas-

kin, a retired Marine lieutenant general and secretary of the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. “His life changed the world for the better and we are forever grateful for all the sacrifices he and his family have made for freedom and equality.”

While Roosevelt’s order opened the military to Black service members, full integration didn’t happen until President Harry S. Truman fully desegregated the armed forces in 1948. As a result, the Montford Point Marines had to train separately from white troops at their Jacksonville, N.C., camp. Lt. Gen. Thomas Holcomb, who was then commandant of the Marine Corps, vehemently

opposed allowing Black Americans into military service at the time.

“He endured unimaginable obstacles in the segregated Marine Corps,” Gaskin said of Eaglin. “I will always remember and admire his strength, resilience, and we honor his service to our country with appreciation for the inspiration he instilled in all of us.”

Born in 1915, Eaglin was also one of the oldest living Marine veterans at the time of his death in Fayetteville, N.C., on Aug. 15. He is survived by his wife Elaine, five children, several grandchildren and a dozen great-grandchildren, according to the North Carolina Department of Military and Veteran Affairs.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man convicted of using dead brother's identity

ME PORTLAND — An 86-year-old man accused of assuming his brother's identity decades ago and using it to double dip on Social Security benefits has been convicted of several charges, authorities said.

Napoleon Gonzalez, of Etna, assumed the identity of his brother in 1965, a quarter century after his sibling's death as an infant, and used the stolen identity to obtain Social Security benefits under both identities, multiple passports and state identification cards, law enforcement officials said.

A U.S. District Court jury in Bangor convicted him of mail fraud, Social Security fraud, passport fraud and identity theft.

Gonzalez claimed that he took on his deceased brother's identity at the direction of the Air Force's Office of Special Investigations while participating in an undercover operation in the 1960s, according to court documents. He later admitted to faking his death under his own identity and continuing with his brother's identity, the documents indicated.

Black bear attacks boy, 7, in his backyard

NY BEDFORD — A black bear attacked a 7-year-old boy outside his family's home in suburban New York, sending the child to a hospital with injuries that were not life threatening, officials said.

The attack happened outside a home in Bedford, about 45 miles northeast of New York

City.

North Castle Police Chief Peter Simonsen told News 12 Westchester that the child was playing in his backyard with a sibling when the bear attacked. The boy's parents quickly rescued their son, said Simonsen, who called the response "extremely brave."

A North Castle police officer shot the bear.

Coast Guard rescues man stuck on island

FL MIAMI — A 64-year-old man whose sailboat became disabled spent three days stranded on an island in the Bahamas before the U.S. Coast Guard spotted a flare he fired and rescued him, the Coast Guard said.

The crew of a Coast Guard Air Station Miami aircraft dropped food, water and a radio to communicate with the man, who told them about his ordeal, the agency said in a news release.

The Coast Guard cutter Paul Clark rescued the man on Cay Sal. He is in good health.

Aerial photos released by the Coast Guard showed that the man, whose name wasn't released, had etched the letters "SOS" in the sandy beach.

Sheriff pleads guilty to groping Judge Hatchett

GA ATLANTA — A Georgia sheriff pleaded guilty to groping TV Judge Glenda Hatchett, who recalled being so stunned that she froze when the lawman grabbed and squeezed her breast at a hotel bar last year during a law enforcement conference.

Bleckley County Sheriff Kris-

topher Coody pleaded guilty in Cobb County State Court to a misdemeanor charge of sexual battery and was sentenced to a year on probation, news outlets reported. He also resigned from the office.

"He so violated me, and at that moment I felt so powerless," Hatchett said after the hearing. "I see myself as a strong woman. I have never been a victim, and I felt it was important for there to be accountability."

An Atlanta attorney, Hatchett starred in the courtroom reality shows "Judge Hatchett" and "The Verdict With Judge Hatchett."

Council member pleads guilty in shoplifting case

AL HUNTSVILLE — An Alabama city councilman pleaded guilty to two counts of misdemeanor shoplifting.

Huntsville City Council member Devyn Keith agreed to a plea deal.

Keith, 34, was arrested in February and was charged with four counts of shoplifting. He stole merchandise from three different Walmart stores in Huntsville, police said.

Two charges were dropped as part of the deal and Keith will pay nearly \$465 restitution for the amount from all four cases, news outlets reported.

Ex-police chief charged with soliciting sex

NY NEW YORK — A former suburban New York police chief who once led the Gilgo Beach killings investigation and later went to

prison for beating a suspect was arrested again after authorities said he attempted to engage in sex with an undercover ranger at a Long Island park.

James Burke, Suffolk County's police chief from 2012 to 2015, was arrested at Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park in Farmingville after exposing himself to the ranger and saying he was interested in oral sex, according to an arrest report obtained by the Associated Press.

Burke, 58, then attempted to leverage his status as a former law enforcement official to get out of the arrest.

Burke is charged with offering a sex act, public lewdness, indecent exposure and criminal solicitation, Suffolk County Police Commissioner Rodney Harrison said.

Solar panels will deliver power to 37k homes

VA CHANTILLY — Travelers taking off and landing at Dulles International Airport outside the nation's capital will soon see an array of 200,000 solar panels laid out near the runways — the largest renewable energy project ever built at a U.S. airport.

Dominion Energy and the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority ceremonially broke ground on the 835-acre project.

The solar farm is just a small part of a huge push by Dominion to add 16,000 megawatts of solar capacity — enough to power 4 million homes — by 2035 as it seeks to comply with a state law requiring 100% of its non-nuclear energy production to be zero emission by 2045.

— From Associated Press

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College football has end-of-an-era feel

Associated Press

Welcome to the final season of college football as we know it.

Extreme? Maybe, but 2023 has an end-of-an-era feel.

Texas and Oklahoma are taking their last lap in the Big 12. The Pac-12 is still a Power Five conference. Will it even be a conference in 2024 after the Big Ten opens its West Wing and the Big 12 expands yet again? The College Football Playoff is a four-team event for the last time this year before tripling in size.

Everything about the collegiate sports model seems ripe for radical changes. But not quite yet.

"It does seem like it will feel like a lame-duck year at some point in time," former Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bowlsby said.

Before the maps are redrawn (again) and the stakes are remade (again), there is one more season left to appreciate what's being lost — or long for what's being gained.

"I'm resigned to it," said ESPN's Rece Davis on The AP Top 25 College Football Podcast. "There are parts of it I will miss very much because I consider myself, at heart, a traditionalist. I love the nostalgia of the sport. Maybe, save, base-

ball, I don't think there is another sport that conjures up that type of deep emotional connection that college football does. And we're losing some of that."

Conference realignment

Fourteen schools will be playing in new leagues this season: four in the Big 12, four in Conference USA and six in the American Athletic Conference. Next season, super conferences arrive as the Big Ten grows to 18 and the Southeastern Conference and Big 12 bulk up to 16 schools.

The Big 12 is where the past and future collide this fall.

While newcomers BYU, Cincinnati, Houston and UCF celebrate their arrival in the Power Five — that term is going away, too — Texas and Oklahoma are going on a farewell tour before heading to an SEC that will be anything but hospitable.

The Longhorns are favorites to win the Big 12 — something they have not done since 2009 — and happy to wear the black suit.

"They've kind of adopted the John Wick mentality," coach Steve Sarkisian told reporters. "I think that they've kind of assumed this mentality of, 'Em-

brace the hate.'"

Say goodbye to Bedlam. The 110th meeting of the Oklahoma-Oklahoma State series will be the last, at least for now.

"I think that sadness for me is around the rivalries that will fall by the wayside," Bowlsby said. "And I think it's extraordinarily difficult with the larger (conference) formats to keep traditional rivalries together. And a lot of that is what puts fans in the stands."

Realignment taketh away, but it can also giveth. After a decade apart, and insisting they don't care about each other, Texas and Texas A&M will play again in 2024.

When it comes to last-gorounds, the saddest will be in the Pac-12, which is simultaneously on the brink of extinction while also primed to be maybe the most competitive and entertaining conference in college football this year.

Heisman Trophy winner Caleb Williams and coach Lincoln Riley have No. 6 Southern California swaggering again.

"I think coaching or playing at USC is one of the great responsibilities in our sport," Riley said during Pac-12 media day. "This is the program that is so important to the sport, to the

success of football on the West Coast in general, and has such a great history."

USC along with No. 10 Washington, No. 15 Oregon and UCLA, coming off consecutive winning seasons under Chip Kelly, are moving to the Big Ten in 2024. Arizona, Arizona State, Colorado and Utah are bound for the Big 12.

College Football Playoff

For more than a century, major college football vigorously resisted using a playoff to decide a champion.

Then it took less than a decade for the first playoff to expand. Year 10 of the CFP will be the final one with only four teams competing for a title before the 12-team format is implemented in 2024.

The days of one bad game potentially ruining a team's title hopes are going away. There will be fewer winner-take-all moments.

Do you love classic rivalries such as Michigan-Ohio State and Alabama-Auburn? Will you like them as much when they can be played two or even three times in a season? Maybe in back-to-back weeks?

In division-less super conferences, the odds of that happening go way up starting in 2024.

ACC westward expansion picking up steam

Associated Press

The Atlantic Coast Conference is making progress toward an expansion that could grab Stanford and California from the sinking Pac-12, a person with direct knowledge of the ACC's potential move told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The person spoke on the condition of anonymity because the conference was not making its internal discussions public.

"It's gaining momentum," the person said about the possibility of expansion being approved.

Two weeks ago, the ACC got so far as to gather its entire board of university leaders twice in three days to consider adding Stanford, Cal and possibly SMU, the Dallas-based American Athletic Conference school. They never took an official vote, knowing they would not have had the necessary 12 of 15 votes for expansion to be approved.

How new revenue generated by adding members to the conference would be distributed has been a sticking point for several schools, among them Flor-

ida State, Clemson and North Carolina.

But expansion was never a dead issue.

The person said Commissioner Jim Phillips has continued to work on a revenue distribution model that would direct a large portion of the money ESPN would pay the conference to cover three new members to a pool that pays out performance-based bonuses.

The person said the league was trying to arrange a meeting of its athletic directors for Thursday, but there was no

meeting of the full board of presidents and chancellors yet scheduled.

ACC leaders earlier this year agreed to a "success incentive initiative" that would allow schools to earn more money generated from their own post-season performances. Media rights revenue is shared equally in the ACC, but expansion could force a shift in that philosophy.

The Pac-12 has been stripped of eight members, who have already announced they will join either the Big Ten or Big 12 in August 2024.

New coach, sort-of-new offense at Navy

Stars and Stripes

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — A new era of Midshipmen football has created a buzz around Navy.

Brian Newberry's first season as head coach at Navy is set to kick off Saturday, and while there are also three coordinators in their first year on the job, there is a wealth of returning talent on the field.

The Midshipmen's leading passer, rusher and receiver from last year return, but the offense they will operate is going to be slightly different from the triple option that has been such an integral part of service academy football.

Newberry tabbed Grant Chesnut, with whom he worked at Kennesaw State, to be his offensive coordinator, and things reportedly went well in camp.

"I was excited when I hired Coach Chesnut," Newberry said. "I'm even more excited about that now."

Chesnut had been with the Owls since 2014, and they built a 68-24 record and ranked among the top three in the Football

Championship Subdivision in rushing in six of the last seven years through the use of the spread option.

"We want to give the illusion of being very complex but be simple for our players," Newberry said in a preseason news conference. "Simple is always better than complex."

The Midshipmen will not be a team that throws the ball 30-40 times a game, Chestnut said, emphasizing that the triple option is still the base. The most notable change has been utilizing both under-center and shotgun formations.

"That's the key piece, because you can take the skill guys and do a lot of different things," Chesnut said.

The anchor of the offensive line is center Lirion Murtezi, one of four seniors to be voted a team captain and a six-game starter in 2022. Three other linemen — junior Connor McMahon, senior Sam Glover and senior Joshua Pena — started 10 or more games last year.

Senior Tai Lavatai started the

first eight games at quarterback last year before getting injured, and senior Xavier Arline started the final four games, including against Army. Both missed most of the spring practices recovering from injuries, and sophomore Blake Horvath spent a lot of time with the first team.

Horvath and Lavatai have emerged as the leading contenders for the starting job. Both are likely to play in the season opener.

Also in the backfield is the 2022 leading rusher in fullback Daba Fofana, who ran for 819 yards and six touchdowns on 186 carries as a sophomore.

Out wide, captain Jayden Umbarger figures to do the heavy lifting again after a 16-catch, 265-yard, two-touchdown junior campaign. The other three 100-yard receivers have moved on, leaving room for unproven players to make themselves known.

The defense will feature nine starters from 2022 and a coordinator who has worked with

Newberry since before they arrived at the academy in 2019.

After being promoted from defensive coordinator, Newberry elevated P.J. Volker to that role, one he will balance with linebackers coach duties. Under their direction, Navy was among the top three among American Athletic Conference teams in yards allowed per game in each of the past four seasons.

"One thing I love about our defense is we're never stagnant," said Jacob Busic, a captain and third-year starter at defensive end. "We get better every year. We just keep putting in work, and we're all super close."

Although the Midshipmen finished just 4-8 last year and were picked ninth in the AAC preseason media poll, they are confident they will bounce back.

"The goals that our team has always had," Lavatai said. "Win the (Commander in Chief's Trophy), go to the AAC Championship, go to a New Year's bowl."

Ohtani has torn elbow ligament, won't pitch rest of year

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Shohei Ohtani won't pitch for the rest of the season because of a torn ligament in his right elbow, Los Angeles Angels general manager Perry Minasian said Wednesday night.

The Angels don't yet know whether the major league homers leader and 10-game winner will need surgery to repair his ulnar collateral ligament for the second time. Ohtani had his first Tommy John surgery in late 2018, following his AL Rookie of the Year season.

"A tough day for him," Minasian said. "Tough day for all of us."

The two-way superstar left the mound abruptly in the second inning of his start against

Cincinnati after throwing 26 pitches in the opener of a doubleheader. Ohtani, who hit his 44th homer in the first inning, then insisted on playing in the nightcap even after the tear was discovered while running tests between games.

The injury could have a massive effect on baseball's free-agent market this winter with Ohtani headed to free agency. The uniquely valuable AL MVP front-runner was expected to receive the most lucrative contract offers in baseball history after six landmark seasons with the Angels, but now much will depend on the health of his pitching elbow.

Ohtani plans to get second opinions on whether surgery is necessary, Minasian said.

"If I was to bet on anybody bouncing back, he would be the guy," said Minasian, who didn't know the grade of Ohtani's ligament tear. "I believe he'll be back and he'll be able to do both again at a very high level."

Ohtani sits atop the home run leaderboard and is batting .304 with a 1.069 OPS and 91 RBIs. He is also 10-5 with a 3.14 ERA and a major league-best .184 opponent batting average as the Angels' ace on the mound.

Minasian isn't sure whether his two-way superstar will continue to chase the major league homers crown while serving as their designated hitter this year, but those plans were secondary to the importance of Ohtani's long-term health.

"I think he needs time to wrap

his head around it, talk to the people close to him," Minasian said.

With 16 losses in their last 21 games and no realistic playoff hopes after losing five of six on their homestand, the Angels actually got a double dose of terrible injury news.

Three-time AL MVP Mike Trout is also going back on the injured list to speed his recovery from surgery on his broken hand. Trout returned Tuesday after missing 38 games, but didn't play in the doubleheader after waking up sore. Minasian hopes Trout will play again this season, but is uncertain how long he will need to recover from a major injury in his third consecutive season.

Lance loses 49ers backup QB job to Darnold

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Sam Darnold has won the backup quarterback job in San Francisco, putting Trey Lance's status with the 49ers in doubt less than three years after the team traded three first-round picks to draft him.

Coach Kyle Shanahan told flagship radio station KNBR on Wednesday that Darnold recently took control of the race to be Brock Purdy's backup and that he told the quarterbacks about the decision on Tuesday night.

Lance didn't take part in practice on Wednesday and the 49ers are considering all options, including a possible trade if a partner can be found. But Shanahan said he hopes to have Lance on the roster as the third quarterback when the season starts Sept. 10 in Pittsburgh.

"This isn't a thing that we're giving up on Trey," Shanahan said. "This is more how Brock played in his seven games and that was decided before the season started. And then how good Sam's looked. They both looked good but we do have to make a decision here. You only get so many reps at it. We feel starting about 10 days ago that Sam real-

ly separated himself and we have to keep it real that way."

NFL Network first reported that Darnold had beaten out Lance for the backup job behind Brock Purdy.

If the 49ers move on from Lance before the start of his third season in the NFL, it would be a remarkable backtrack following the hefty investment they made in hopes of Lance becoming a franchise quarterback.

San Francisco traded three first-round picks and a third-rounder to Miami in 2021 to move up from No. 12 and draft the untested Lance third overall.

Lance started only 17 games at FCS-level North Dakota State before the Niners drafted him, and he never got much of a chance to gain the experience he needed in the NFL.

He spent his rookie season backing up Jimmy Garoppolo, starting just two games as an injury replacement and being hampered by a finger injury on his throwing hand.

Lance was handed the starting job last season, but that lasted less than five quarters as he broke his ankle early in Week 2 and was sidelined for the rest of the season.

"It's been a tough road for him because the times he has gotten an opportunity, he ended up getting hurt and missed that window," Shanahan said. "Now he's sitting in this position."

Purdy, taken with the last draft pick in 2022, came on late in the season and won his first seven starts to take over the starting role headed into this season.

San Francisco signed Darnold in free agency after he flamed out with the Jets and Carolina after also being drafted third overall in 2018 by New York. He ended up doing enough in practices and the first two preseason games to beat out Lance.

Lance has completed 56 of 102 passes in his brief NFL career for 797 yards, five TDs, three interceptions and an 84.5 passer rating. He has also rushed for 235 yards and one TD on 54 carries.

Lance got off to a shaky start this preseason, but did lead two late scoring drives after coming on in relief of Purdy and Darnold in the second half last week against Denver.

If the Niners can find a trade partner for Lance, his four starts will be the fewest for any quar-

terback for the team that drafted him in the top 5 in the common draft era. Jack Thompson started five games for Cincinnati after being taken third overall in 1979.

Shanahan said the team would "try to do right for Trey," but finding a partner willing to give up compensation for Lance and take on the \$5.3 million in guaranteed money owed in 2024 may prove difficult.

If that's the case, Shanahan said he will be happy to have Lance after running out of healthy quarterbacks last season.

"I feel very, very fortunate to have both of them here," Shanahan said of Darnold and Lance. "I really hope when it's said and done that all three of these guys are here, and you never know when that's going to come up. We needed four guys last year. It doesn't happen much, but if we can have Trey as an option here, I would feel extremely happy about that. I think the other quarterbacks in our room would and I think our team would. Trey is a very well-liked guy, one of the better people I've been around, and I do think he's going to have a lot of success in this league."

Gauff's return makes her a major contender at US Open

Associated Press

After losing in the first round at Wimbledon last month, Coco Gauff holed up at her London hotel to be alone and think.

About what happened at the All England Club. About how she felt. About what she wanted to do to avoid that sort of result at the next Grand Slam tournament, the U.S. Open, which starts Monday in New York.

"I didn't leave the room for two days. I like literally didn't. I got my food ordered to the room," Gauff said in an interview with The Associated Press. "I realize: Those two days were necessary, because I got time to reflect and just allow myself to be sad. A lot of times on tour, we don't have time to allow ourselves to be sad, so then those emotions build up into the next match. And I think

that those two days, honestly, probably helped me. I really completely changed my mentality."

That wasn't all she changed, and just look at Gauff now: Ranked No. 6, the 19-year-old from Florida must be counted among the leading contenders at Flushing Meadows for the sort of trophy she has set her sights on, and appeared destined to hold, for quite some time.

"Obviously the goal is to win a Slam," said Gauff, the runner-up to Iga Swiatek at last year's French Open, "but I'm not going to be (thinking), 'OK, well, I'm supposed to be the U.S. Open champion.' That's not the mindset that I have. And when people put that on me, I have no choice but to accept it and just know that it comes from the heart."

With a new coaching arrangement, reworked footwork on her forehand and a commitment to aggression early in points, Gauff is playing as well as anyone. She has won 11 of 12 matches and her two biggest titles — in Washington and Cincinnati, both on hard courts — since that defeat against 2020 Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin at Wimbledon. One of the recent victories came over 2022 U.S. Open champion Swiatek, who claimed all 14 previous sets they played.

"Wimbledon was tough for all of us to digest," said Pere Riba, Gauff's full-time coach since last month, alongside temporary consultant Brad Gilbert. "But we talked about things she can improve. And Coco was open to that."