

## Walz ‘brings the joy’ accepting ticket spot

*Associated Press*

CHICAGO — Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz accepted his party's nomination for vice president Wednesday night, using his Democratic National Convention address to thank the packed arena for “bringing the joy” to an election transformed by the elevation of his running mate, Vice President Kamala Harris.

“We’re all here tonight for one beautiful, simple reason: We love this country,” Walz said as thousands of delegates hoisted vertical placards reading “Coach Walz” in red, white and blue.

Many Americans had never heard of Walz until Harris made him her running mate, and the speech was an opportunity to introduce himself. He leaned into his experiences as a football coach, his time in the National Guard and his recounting of his family's fertility struggles — all parts of his biography that Republicans have questioned in the days since Harris picked him.

While it's unclear if the speech will attract new voters, he further charmed Democratic supporters with his background and helped to balance Harris' coastal roots as a cultural representative of Midwestern states whose voters she needs this fall.

The Harris campaign said Walz had worked on his speech for multiple days and he used a teleprompter for the first time, practicing to ensure he was prepared. He told the crowd, “I haven't given a lot of speeches like this but I've given a lot of pep talks.”

“Some folks just don't understand what it takes to be a good neighbor,” Walz said. “Take Donald Trump and JD Vance.”

Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, bashed the convention as a “charade” earlier Wednesday and noted that he has been a frequent topic of conversation. He also singled out his predecessor, former President Barack Obama, for a highly critical con-

vention speech Tuesday night, saying Obama had been “nasty.”

Walz described his upbringing in Nebraska and teaching and coaching football in Minnesota and told the crowd, “Thank you for bringing the joy to this fight.”

But he also criticized Trump and his running mate, Vance, and took several swipes at Republican policies. “While other states were banning books from their schools, we were banishing hunger from ours,” he said.

Walz has been accused of embellishing his background. His wife this week clarified that she did not undergo in vitro fertilization, as Walz has repeatedly claimed, but used other fertility treatments. Republicans also have criticized Walz for a 2018 comment he made about carrying weapons in war. Though he served in the National Guard for 24 years, he did not deploy to a war zone.

Walz has made his family's struggle with fertility a central

part of his narrative, a tangible way to connect with voters alarmed at the erosion of reproductive rights in the U.S. But Gwen Walz on Tuesday issued a statement that detailed the experience more comprehensively and disclosed that they relied on a different process known as intrauterine insemination, or IUI.

“If you've never experienced infertility, I guarantee you know someone who has,” Tim Walz said Wednesday.

His son, Gus, openly wept throughout the speech, wiping his eyes with tissues while watching from the front row. Through tears he mouthed, “That's my dad.”

The night's theme was “a fight for our freedoms,” with the programming focusing on abortion access and other rights that Democrats want to center in their campaign against Trump. Speaker after speaker argued that their party wants to defend freedoms while Republicans want to take them away.

## Bulletproof glass used as Trump returns to outdoor rallies

*Associated Press*

ASHEBORO, N.C. — At his first outdoor rally since last month's attempted assassination, Donald Trump spoke from behind bulletproof glass Wednesday in North Carolina at an event focused on national security. On politics, he called his predecessor Barack Obama “nasty” for his comments the night before at the Democratic National Convention.

Trump blamed President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris for the deadly Afghanistan withdrawal and for wars in Ukraine and the Middle East while returning repeatedly in his remarks to the Democratic gath-

ering in Chicago, where speaker after speaker has assailed Trump as a threat to the country should he return to the White House.

The former president, now the GOP nominee, asked the crowd gathered at the North Carolina Aviation Museum & Hall of Fame whether they had seen the speeches given Tuesday by former President Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama.

“He was taking shots at your president. And so was Michelle. You know, they always say, ‘Sir, please stick to policy. Don't get personal.’ And yet they're getting personal all night long, these people,” he said, asking: “Do I still have to stick to policy?”

Trump, who is facing Harris in the November election after Biden stepped aside, spoke from behind a podium surrounded by panes of bulletproof glass that formed a protective wall across the stage — part of ramped-up security measures aimed at keeping him safe after the attack by a Pennsylvania gunman on July 13.

Storage containers were stacked around the perimeter to create additional walls and block sight lines. Snipers were on roofs at the venue, where old aircraft were sitting behind the podium and a large American flag was suspended from cranes.

The event, billed as focused on national security issues, was part

of Trump's counterprogramming to the Democratic National Convention, which is underway in Chicago. Allies have been urging him to focus on policy instead of personal attacks against Harris as he struggles to adjust to Biden's departure from the race.

The second night of the Democrats' convention Tuesday was a highly energized affair that featured speeches from both Obamas, who went after Trump in particularly biting terms.

“His limited and narrow view of the world made him feel threatened by the existence of two hard-working, highly educated, successful people who happen to be Black,” Michelle Obama said.

# Navy destroyer sent through Taiwan Strait

By ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

A U.S. Navy guided-missile destroyer steamed through the Taiwan Strait on Thursday, the Navy's first transit of the waterway in months and the fourth this year.

The USS Ralph Johnson went northeast through the strait, entering from the South China Sea and exiting in the East China Sea "to demonstrate the United States' commitment to upholding lawful use of the sea for all nations as a principle," U.S. 7th Fleet spokeswoman Lt. j.g. Sarah Merrill said Thursday.

The U.S. routinely sends warships, and, less frequently, aircraft through the 110-mile-wide

channel that separates mainland China from the island of Taiwan.

"Ralph Johnson's transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the U.S. commitment to a stable, free and open Indo-Pacific," Merrill said. "The U.S. military flies, sails and operates anywhere international law allows."

Beijing views Taiwan, a functional democracy, as a breakaway province that "does not qualify for sovereign status," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said July 31, and that must be reunified with the mainland, by force if necessary.

While the Navy typically says

the trips are intended to uphold "freedom of navigation for all nations as a principle," Beijing views them as provocative.

China's Eastern Theater Command said it "organized naval and air forces" to monitor the Ralph Johnson's trip, which was "publicly hyped up" by the U.S., spokesman Col. Xi Li wrote on the Weibo social media website.

"The theater troops are always on high alert and resolutely defend national sovereignty and security and regional peace and stability," he wrote.

Merrill did not specify whether the Ralph Johnson encountered any Chinese forces in the strait but said "U.S. military

vessels and aircraft routinely interact with foreign warships and aircraft while operating throughout the region."

The Canadian frigate HMCS Montreal made a similar passage July 31, according to a post that day by Canadian Joint Operations Command on X.

The U.S. Navy last sent a warship, the guided-missile destroyer USS Halsey, through the strait on May 8. Beijing at the time issued its own statement within an hour of the 7th Fleet's announcement and again alleged the U.S. had "publicly hyped" the situation. China also scrambled naval and air forces to monitor the vessel, it said.

## Japan restarts deliveries for airfield on Okinawa

By BRIAN McELHINEY  
AND KEISHI KOJA  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAGO CITY, Okinawa — Quarried material for a new U.S. military airfield is once again being shipped to a northern port after a nearly two-month pause spurred by a fatal truck accident.

Trucks began hauling loads of material to Awa port again on Thursday, a spokesman for Okinawa prefecture's Seashore Disaster Prevention Division said by phone that day. The Okinawa Defense Bureau — an arm of Japan's Defense Ministry — notified the division on Wednesday that shipments would resume.

The material, used to reclaim a portion of Oura Bay for the Marine Corps airfield under construction at Camp Schwab, is quarried on Okinawa, trucked to the port and moved by ships to the airfield site.

Work at Awa and Motobu ports stopped in July after a se-

curity guard was killed and a protester injured in a June 28 accident at Awa port.

A date to restart work in Motobu has not been decided, the spokesman said.

Security guard Yoshikazu Usami, 47, and an unidentified 72-year-old woman "for some reason" stepped into the path of a truck turning left from the port, according to Okinawa Prefectural Police that day.

Usami suffered severe head injuries and was declared dead at a hospital, a police spokesman said.

In a July 9 letter, the division asked the defense bureau to explain measures that will be taken to prevent another accident before restarting operations, the division spokesman said. "But we haven't heard anything from the bureau yet," he said.

Some government officials in Japan are required to speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

## USS San Diego heads out to Japan to trade places

By ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

The amphibious transport dock ship USS San Diego is on its way to Japan, where it will take the place of its sister ship USS Green Bay.

The San Diego sailed away from its namesake city on Aug. 14, U.S. Pacific Fleet announced Tuesday. The warship was homeported for 12 years at the naval base there.

The ship will make its way to Sasebo Naval Base on Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, as part of a swap announced last month by the U.S. 7th Fleet.

Task Force 76 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. John Mike declined to comment on the ship's arrival date, citing security concerns.

The base is home to the America Amphibious Ready Group, led by the amphibious assault ship USS America, which routinely deployed with the Green Bay over the past decade.

The San Diego, commissioned in 2012, is three years younger than the Green Bay. The Navy in 2021 awarded BAE Systems a \$90.2 million contract for a yearlong modernization period for the San Diego.

The work included hull maintenance, ballast tank repairs and refurbished living spaces.

The Green Bay underwent a similar, yearlong maintenance period prior to its deployment to Sasebo in 2015, U.S. Pacific Fleet said in a press release that year.

The San Diego will join the group to support a variety of missions by transporting personnel, equipment and vehicles that would be used as part of a landing force, and aircraft like the MV-22 Osprey tiltrotor or Navy and Marine Corps helicopters, Mike said.

Meanwhile, the Green Bay will make its way to San Diego, concluding a decadelong assignment at Sasebo.

# Pro-Palestinian protesters march at DNC

Associated Press

CHICAGO — More than 2,000 pro-Palestinian protesters marched Wednesday past a park where pro-Israel demonstrators had gathered earlier and toward the arena hosting the third night of the Democratic National Convention.

The demonstration, which stayed largely peaceful, came a day after violent clashes between police and protesters led to 56 arrests at a much smaller unsanctioned protest outside the Israeli Consulate.

Organizers of Wednesday's demonstration drew on the Chicago area's Palestinian community, one of the largest in the country, by bringing buses from suburban mosques.

Raed Shuk, 48, came with his children from the suburbs, including his 2-year-old son, who sat on Shuk's shoulders ahead of the march. Shuk, whose parents are Palestinian, said they have come to so many rallies that his son knows the chants by heart.

"Everybody's humanity needs to be equally addressed here and there," he said of Gaza. "I want to help my children learn from this experience that you always like to stand up for your rights and always peacefully protest."

The march, one of the largest anticipated demonstrations of the week, took on a festive tone at times as a drum line led marchers and a sea of Palestinian flags waved above the crowds. Some kids ate popsicles as they walked,

and others were pushed in strollers or rode in wagons.

The crowd stopped outside a park that is roughly a block from the United Center and used megaphones and air horns to call out elected leaders, including Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, for being "complicit" in the war in Gaza. The two-term Democrat, who was under consideration as Vice President Kamala Harris' running mate, criticized a ceasefire resolution Chicago approved in January.

As marchers passed under a new elevated train station near the United Center that was completed just before the DNC, officers were seen bringing a person to the ground on the platform above. In response, hundreds of

protesters pushed against the edge of the station, banging on the glass with their hands and flag poles as they called on police to free the person. The person left through the station's emergency exit moments later, accompanied by officers but not in handcuffs, prompting cheers from the crowd.

The crowds of pro-Palestinian protesters included many families and people of different faiths. Small groups of Muslims gathered in prayer at a park just ahead of the march's kickoff, using keffiyeh as prayer rugs. Rabbis were among the leaders of the march, and a small group marched through in the crowd holding a sign that said "Christians for Ceasefire."

## Parents of American held in Gaza plead for release

Associated Press

The parents of a 23-year-old American taken hostage by Hamas during the Oct. 7 attack on Israel gave a moving speech Wednesday at the Democratic National Convention, pleading for the release of the dozens of people who continue to be held captive in Gaza.

"This is a political convention. But needing our only son — and all of the cherished hostages — home is not a political issue. It is a humanitarian issue," said Jon Polin, whose son Hersh Goldberg-Polin lost part of his left arm and was kidnapped from Israel by militants who attacked the music festival he was attending.

Polin and his wife, Rachel Goldberg-Polin, were greeted with an extended ovation and chants of "bring him home" by the thousands of Democratic delegates in Chicago.

They steered clear of politics in their 10-minute speech, but Jon Polin said the families of the American hostages meet regularly in Washington and are

heartened to see bipartisan support for securing the release of their loved ones. President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, he said, are "both working tirelessly" for a deal between Israel and Hamas for a cease-fire in Gaza and the release of the remaining hostages.

"Hersh, if you can hear us, we love you, stay strong, survive," Rachel Polin-Goldberg said.

She and her husband wore stickers with the number 320, drawing attention to the number of days their son has been held.

The speech put an emotional and human face on the Israel-Hamas conflict, a sensitive issue for Democrats, who face pressure from pro-Palestinian protesters to more forcefully press Israel to end the siege that has leveled much of the Gaza Strip and killed tens of thousands of people, according to the Gaza health ministry, which does not distinguish in its death count between militants and civilians.

## Trump allies are seeking Kennedy's endorsement

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Close allies to Donald Trump are quietly urging independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to endorse the Republican nominee if he withdraws from the campaign for the White House as soon as this week.

Trump's son, Donald Trump Jr., along with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson and GOP donor Omeed Malik are among those who have been working behind the scenes to lobby Kennedy to drop out of the race and back Trump, according to a person familiar with the efforts. The person requested anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Kennedy will speak Friday "about the present historical moment and his path forward," his campaign announced Wednesday, fueling growing speculation that he could drop out and support Trump. Kennedy's running mate openly discussed the possibility on a podcast this week, saying the cam-

paign was considering a move to "join forces" with Trump to limit the election chance of Kamala Harris, whose Democratic convention winds up Thursday night in Chicago.

The move would have once seemed unthinkable for Kennedy, a Democrat for most of his life and — as the nephew of President John F. Kennedy and the son of Robert F. Kennedy — a member of a beloved Democratic dynasty.

Last month, during the Republican National Convention, Kennedy's son posted and then quickly deleted a video showing a phone call between Kennedy and Trump, in which the former president appeared to try to talk Kennedy into siding with him.

Kennedy will give a speech in Phoenix, hours before Trump is scheduled to hold a rally in neighboring Glendale. A spokesperson for Kennedy, Stefanie Spear, declined to say whether he planned to drop out or why he chose Arizona for his speech.



# Zelenskyy makes trip to Ukraine border

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — President Volodymyr Zelenskyy toured the northeastern Ukrainian region of Sumy on Thursday in his first visit to the border area since his forces launched their surprise cross-border offensive more than two weeks ago, seizing dozens of Russian villages and the town of Sudzha.

Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces have claimed control of another settlement in the Russian region of Kursk and taken more Russian prisoners of war whom he hopes to swap for captured Ukrainians, adding to what he calls an “exchange fund.”

“Another settlement in the Kursk region is now under Ukrainian control, and we have replenished the exchange fund,” Zelenskyy wrote on X after hearing a report from the mili-

tary commander, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi.

While he traveled to an area close to the area of the Ukrainian incursion into Russia, he did not go into Russia itself — a move that would have been regarded by Moscow as a provocation. He has previously said that Ukraine has no plan to occupy the area long term but wants to create a buffer zone to prevent further attacks from that area into Ukraine.

After his meeting with local military authorities, Zelenskyy said the Kursk operation launched Aug. 6 has led to a decrease in Russian shelling and a reduction in civilian casualties in Ukraine’s northern Sumy region.

The daring Ukrainian foray into the Kursk region has rattled the Kremlin, showing Russia’s vulnerability and shat-

tered President Vladimir Putin’s efforts to pretend that the country has been largely unaffected by the 2½ year war.

Authorities in Kursk began to put up concrete shelters at bus stops and other locations around the city to protect it from shelling and plan similar work in Zheleznogorsk and Kurchatov, where the Kursk nuclear power plant is located, the region’s acting Gov. Alexei Smirnov said on his Telegram channel.

Putin said in a video call with officials that he has ordered the creation of self-defense units in Russian regions bordering Ukraine.

Smirnov reported to Putin that over 133,000 people have left areas affected by the fighting in the Kursk region, while more than 19,000 have stayed.

The governor of Bryansk, an-

other Russian region bordering Ukraine, said authorities in the region have conducted training for emergency evacuation from border areas in case it is needed.

Separately, the Defense Ministry reported repelling Ukrainian attacks near the villages of Komarovka, Malaya Loknya, Korenevka and several other settlements in the Kursk region.

Ukraine’s capture of Russian territory comes as Ukraine continues to lose ground in eastern Ukraine. The Russian Defense Ministry said Thursday that its military has claimed control of the village of Mezhevo in Donetsk, part of the industrial Donbas region which Moscow seeks to take entirely.

Ukraine’s push into Russia marks the first capture of Russian territory since World War II.

## Egypt skeptical of proposal for urged Gaza cease-fire

Associated Press

CAIRO — Key mediator Egypt expressed skepticism Wednesday about the proposal meant to bridge gaps in cease-fire talks between Israel and Hamas as more details emerged a day before negotiations were expected to resume in Cairo.

The challenges around the bridging proposal appeared to undermine the optimism for an imminent agreement that U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken carried into his latest Mideast visit this week.

Diplomatic efforts have redoubled as fears grow of a wider regional war after the recent targeted killings of leaders of the militant Hamas and Hezbollah groups, both blamed on Israel, and threats of retaliation.

President Joe Biden spoke with Israeli

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday, and stressed the urgency of reaching a cease-fire and hostage release deal, the White House said.

Officials in Egypt, in its unique role as both a mediator and affected party since it borders Gaza, told The Associated Press that Hamas won’t agree to the bridging proposal for a number of reasons — ones in addition to the long-held wariness over whether a deal would truly remove Israeli forces from Gaza and end the war.

One Egyptian official with direct knowledge of the negotiations said the bridging proposal requires the implementation of the deal’s first phase, which has Hamas releasing the most vulnerable civilian hostages captured in its Oct. 7 attack on Israel that

sparked the war. Parties during the first phase would negotiate the second and third phases with no “guarantees” to Hamas from Israel or mediators.

“The Americans are offering promises, not guarantees,” the official said.

He also said the proposal doesn’t clearly say Israel will withdraw its forces from two strategic corridors in Gaza, the Philadelphi corridor alongside Gaza’s border with Egypt and the Netzarim east-west corridor across the territory. Israel offers to downsize its forces in the Philadelphi corridor, with “promises” to withdraw from the area, he said.

“This is not acceptable for us and of course for Hamas,” the Egyptian official said.

## 2,492-carat diamond, largest in a century, found in Botswana

Associated Press

GABORONE, Botswana — The largest diamond found in more than a century has been unearthed at a mine in Botswana.

The Botswana government says the huge 2,492-carat stone is the second-biggest ever discovered in a mine.

Canadian mining company Lucara Diamond Corp. said in a

statement Wednesday that it recovered the “exceptional” rough diamond from its Karowe Mine in Botswana. Lucara said it was a “high-quality” stone and was found intact.

The weight would make it the largest diamond found in more than 100 years and the second-largest ever dug out of a mine after the Cullinan Diamond discovered in South Africa in 1905.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Data undercut county's dalliance with secession

**CA** SAN BERNARDINO — A Southern California county that voted to consider whether to secede from the state is in fact receiving its fair share of tax dollars and is better off staying put, according to consultants.

The San Bernardino Sun reported Tuesday that Blue Sky Consulting Group determined San Bernardino receives more per-capita funding across all areas than the statewide average and that county-generated tax revenue is far less than the tax revenue generated statewide.

The group was hired to study the matter after residents voted in 2022 to consider whether the county of more than 2 million people was receiving adequate state and federal resources. The ballot measure also authorized considering secession.

## Two killed in plane crash that set off a fire

**TX** ODESSA — A small plane crashed in a West Texas neighborhood Tuesday, killing the pilot and a passenger and setting off a large fire on the ground that injured a woman, authorities said.

Witnesses said the plane struggled to gain altitude after taking off from an Odessa airport and then struck a power line before crashing in an alley at about 7 a.m., according to authorities. Both people aboard the plane died.

The large fire on the ground came after a couple of explosions after the plane crash, Ector County Sheriff Mike Griffis said.

In addition to a couple of mo-

bile homes, some outbuildings in backyards also caught on fire, said Odessa Fire Rescue Chief Jason Cotton.

Joseph Vincent Summa, 48, of Bellaire, was the pilot and Jo-leen Cavaretta Weatherly, 49, of Orange, was the passenger, authorities said.

## River floods village after series of storms

**AK** ANCHORAGE — Storm-battered residents in the western Alaska village of Napakiak were preparing for the third storm in a week Tuesday, days after a minister had to use a front loader to free people from flooded homes.

Napakiak, a Yup'ik village of about 350 residents in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, was flooded Sunday after heavy rains swelled the Kuskokwim River.

Conditions beforehand were "pretty brutal," with winds and a lot of rain, said Job Hale, the minister of Armory of God Baptist Church. Then the water suddenly started rising as river currents pushed into town.

"I have a front loader, which became very handy because there were several people that actually got stuck in their homes," Hale said. Even though homes are elevated, the water level was 3 feet or more and coming up through floors.

## Suit seeks state control over some federal land

**UT** SALT LAKE CITY — Utah's Republican leaders made good Tuesday on a decade-old vow to launch a legal challenge aimed at wresting control from the U.S. government over much of the federal

lands that dominate the state.

The state's attorney general said he asked to file a lawsuit with the U.S. Supreme Court in what is considered a long-shot attempt to assert state powers on U.S. Bureau of Land Management property across about one-third of Utah.

It marks the latest jab in a running feud between states and the U.S. government over who should control huge swaths of the West and the enormous oil and gas, timber, and other resources they contain.

Federal agencies combined have jurisdiction over almost 70% of Utah. The lawsuit targets about half of that federal land — some 29,000 square miles.

Utah's national parks would remain in federal hands under the lawsuit.

## Duck boat captains rescue toddler and father

**MA** CAMBRIDGE — Captains of a Boston "duck boat" rescued a father and son from the Charles River after the toddler tumbled into the water followed by his father on Monday, officials said.

The Boston Duck Tours boat, which takes tourists both on water and on land, was participating in quarterly safety drills when it retrieved the pair from the water. The boy was taken to a hospital as a precaution, the Cambridge Fire Department said.

"This is crazy. This is happening while we're doing training," Michael Rosario, one of the captains, recounted to reporters. "Now we're doing real-life rescue."

The boy, who's under 2, got past a safety railing and fell into the river behind the Royal Son-

esta, a riverfront hotel in Cambridge, according to Massachusetts State Police. His father quickly jumped in after him.

Photos showed both of them in the water with the father clinging to a rock face with one arm while holding his son with the other.

Rosario and co-captain Kevin O'Neill tossed out a safety ring, maneuvered close to them and dropped a ladder.

## State: Law cannot block some from voting in '24

**AL** MONTGOMERY — Alabama says a new state law expanding the list of felonies that cause a person to lose their right to vote won't be enforced until after the November election and asked a judge to dismiss a lawsuit over the effective date.

The Alabama attorney general office wrote in a recent court filing that the new law, which has an Oct. 1 effective date, cannot be used to block people from voting in the upcoming election, because the Alabama Constitution prohibits new election laws from taking effect within six months of the general election.

The Campaign Legal Center had filed the lawsuit last month seeking to clarify that the new law cannot block people from voting in the November election. The center argued that there had been a lack of guidance from the state. Without clarity, they argued, it is setting up a confusing situation for voters and registrars.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of two men, both convicted of attempted murder years ago, who would lose their right to vote under the expanded list.

— From wire reports

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# Season of change, upheaval in college football

*Associated Press*

A new era has arrived in college football, with some of the most recognizable programs in history now playing in different leagues.

The postseason is different, too. The College Football Playoff expands from four to 12 teams, changing the calculus of the championship chase.

There's also change for some of the game's biggest names.

Jim Harbaugh won a national championship at Michigan, his alma mater, and returned to the NFL. Nick Saban retired from coaching with a record seven national titles and becomes an analyst on ESPN's "College GameDay" show. The prolific Dillon Gabriel takes his big arm to his third school, Oregon, for his sixth and final season.

Fans' biggest challenge will be remembering which teams are in which conferences. Save for the SEC, the era of coast-to-coast conferences is upon us.

What's sure to be a wild ride takes off Aug. 24 with four Week Zero games headlined by No. 10 Florida State against Georgia Tech in Dublin.

## Conference realignment

The fall of the Pac-12 caused the conference map to be revamped.

First, Southern California and UCLA decided to defect to the Big Ten and then Oregon and Washington bolted to make it an 18-team conference.

Arizona, Arizona State, Colorado and Utah are now in a 16-team Big 12. Stanford and California and former American Athletic Conference member SMU are now in a 17-team Atlantic Coast Conference.

Pac-12 holdovers Oregon State and Washington State have a scheduling agreement with the Mountain West. All MWC teams will play a game against one or the other.

Texas and Oklahoma begin their long-awaited first year in the Southeastern Conference.

Army goes from being an independent to a football-only member of the AAC, replacing SMU, and Kennesaw State is in Conference USA after moving up from the Football Championship Subdivision.

## College Football Playoff

The expanded playoff will be spread over a month beginning Dec. 20-21 and could require the last two teams standing to play an unprecedented 17 games.

The 12 playoff teams will be the five conference champions ranked highest by the CFP selection committee, plus the next seven highest-ranked teams.

The four highest-ranked conference champions will be seeded one through four and receive first-round byes. The fifth conference champion will be seeded where it was ranked or at No. 12 if it is outside the top 12.

Seeds 5 through 12 will play first-round games at the higher-seeded team's stadium or venue it designates. Winners advance to

quarterfinals played at bowl sites against the four highest-ranked conference champions. The highest seed will receive preferential placement for the semifinals, which will be hosted by the Orange and Cotton Bowl.

The championship game is Jan. 20 at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, easily the latest it has ever been held.

## Georgia is preseason No. 1

Georgia is No. 1 in The Associated Press Top 25 preseason poll for the second straight year. The Bulldogs return a Heisman Trophy candidate in quarterback Carson Beck and, according to BetMGM Sportsbook, are the favorites to win the national title, at 3-1.

No. 2 Ohio State and No. 3 Oregon are the top two teams from the Big Ten in the preseason Top 25, and the SEC's Texas and Alabama are Nos. 4 and 5.

## Coach is in your ear

Football Bowl Subdivision teams will have the option to use coach-to-player communication through the helmet of one player on the field. That player will be identified by having a green dot on the back midline of his helmet. Communication will be turned off with 15 seconds left on the play clock or when the ball is snapped, whichever comes first.

For all three NCAA divisions, teams have the option of using tablets to view in-game video only. The video can include the broadcast feed and camera angles from the coach's sideline and coach's end zone.

# Florida State hopes to build on breakthrough ACC title

*Associated Press*

Mike Norvell and Florida State got a taste of the big time last season. The Seminoles are not about to let that slip away this season.

"It sets the stage and opportunity for us to continue to push and continue to elevate this program to ultimately where it deserves to be," Norvell said after leading Florida State to its first Atlantic Coast Conference title in nine years last season. "That's among the nation's elite, when you look across the course of college football."

That wasn't everyone's opinion, with the undefeated ACC champions getting snubbed by the College Football Playoff due in large part to an injury to starting quarterback Jordan Travis. The season ended with a 63-3 bashing by equally passed-over Georgia in the Orange Bowl with the Seminoles hurting from injuries and opt-outs.

No matter, Norvell said. His 10th-ranked team, picked to defend its ACC title this season, wants to leave no doubt it belongs with the game's very best.

"At the end of the day, a lot of people from the outside might have a perspective of who is great, who is the greatest," said the fifth-year coach. "For us, let's control the things that we can control. Let's go out there and be the best that we can be."

It won't be easy with the talent Florida State lost on offense, including Travis, receivers Keon Coleman and Johnny Davis, tight end Jaheim Bell and tailback Trey Benson.

But Norvell believes he's got plenty of skilled players, led by former Clemson quarterback D.J. Uiagalelei, who had plenty of big moments in three seasons with the Tigers and spent last year leading Oregon State. Offensive lineman Darius Washington has seen a

humble, friendly Uiagalelei bond with teammates since arriving.

"He can still make an impact to everybody on the team just by the way he is," Washington said, "how he comes in every day and works with us."

No. 14 Clemson, which won seven ACC titles in eight seasons between 2015-2022, was picked second behind the Seminoles. The Tigers, the favorites a year ago entering the season, were out of contention before November with a 4-4 record. Five straight wins to close the season has Clemson thinking it can go after fresh championship goals.

No. 19 Miami, led by Washington State transfer Cam Ward, should be right behind in coach Mario Cristobal's third season. Ward is the preseason ACC player of the year after throwing for 6,963 yards and 48 touchdowns with the Cougars.



# Notable players still on NFL roster bubbles

Associated Press

Nick Sirianni was an assistant coach with the Chargers in 2017 when Austin Ekeler made the team following a strong performance in the final preseason game.

Ekeler is now in his eighth NFL season and first in Washington.

Sirianni, who is entering his fourth season as the Eagles head coach, used clips from Ekeler to motivate players going into Philadelphia's preseason finale last year. He'll try the same tactic before the Eagles face Minnesota on Saturday.

"Yeah, we'll probably do something similar to that," Sirianni said Wednesday. "But as far as the guys here, we had a good amount of undrafted free agents make it the last couple years."

Sirianni cited Eagles punt returner Britain Covey, cornerback Josh Jobe and linebacker

Ben VanSumeren.

The final preseason game is an opportunity for players on the bubble to impress coaches and earn a roster spot before Tuesday's deadline for cuts. Late-round draft picks and undrafted rookies benefit most from the playing time.

Ekeler was an undrafted running back struggling to make the Chargers before he caught the coaching staff's attention by gaining 108 yards combined rushing and receiving. He eventually worked up to a starting role and had 38 touchdowns rushing and receiving in 2021-22. The Commanders gave him a two-year, \$11.4 million contract in free agency.

While young players battle for roster spots this weekend, several veteran players are on edge because they could be on the way out.

Here are five veteran players on the bubble:

**Kadarius Toney:** Wide receiver Kadarius Toney, a 2021 first-round pick by the New York Giants, helped the Kansas City Chiefs win the Super Bowl two years ago after they acquired him in a trade during the season.

But Toney couldn't build off that success. He struggled last season and was inactive from Week 15 through the playoffs and sat out Kansas City's Super Bowl win over San Francisco.

The Chiefs added veteran wideout Marquise "Hollywood" Brown and drafted Xavier Worthy in the first round to go with Rashee Rice. They also have Skyy Moore, Mecole Hardman and Justin Watson.

**James Bradberry:** Cornerback James Bradberry was a second-team All-Pro in 2022, playing an important role in helping the Philadelphia Eagles reach the Super Bowl. He had a poor season last year and the Eagles moved him to safety after selecting cornerbacks Quinyon Mitchell and Cooper DeJean in the first two rounds

of the NFL Draft.

**Bailey Zappe:** Quarterback Bailey Zappe has started eight games for the New England Patriots in his first two seasons, going 4-4. But Zappe's future is likely elsewhere. Drake Maye was drafted to be the quarterback of the future and Jacoby Brissett was signed to provide veteran leadership. The Patriots also drafted Joe Milton in the sixth round to add depth.

**La'el Collins:** Right tackle La'el Collins hasn't played in an NFL game since 2022 because a knee injury forced him to miss last season.

Buffalo signed Collins to be a swing backup for tackles Dion Dawkins and Spencer Brown. But he has struggled in training camp and was moved to guard as a last option to earn a roster spot.

**Mike Edwards:** Safety Mike Edwards, who won Super Bowl rings with Tampa Bay and Kansas City, is also battling to make the Bills. He missed the spring with a shoulder injury and much of training camp with an ankle injury.

## 4 playoff spots up for grabs in NASCAR's stretch run

Associated Press

BROOKLYN, Mich. — NASCAR has just two races remaining in the regular season and a pair of competitions are on the line.

Tyler Reddick earned his second win of the season Monday at Michigan International Speedway, giving him the points lead in a closely contested, four-driver race for the regular-season championship.

Reddick is 10 points ahead of Chase Elliott while Denny Hamlin and Kyle Larson are within striking distance.

Reddick moved past Larson into the top spot in the Cup standings, and his win opened another spot in the playoffs because he was one of 12 drivers who already earned an automatic bid with a victory.

That leaves four spots available in the 16-car playoffs with races left at Daytona on Sat-

urday night and Sept. 1 at Darlington.

Five drivers have a shot to get in without a win, but at least one will be left out.

"It's really tight on speed on the race track, tight on points," Reddick said. "That's what this Next Gen era has really done, brought us closer together from the front of the field to the back."

Martin Truex Jr. is No. 13 in the playoff standings with a 77-point cushion over the cutline, but no lead in the format can be considered safe.

Ty Gibbs, Chris Buescher and Ross Chastain currently have the final three spots and Bubba Wallace slipped to 17th, one point behind Chastain.

"We knew at the beginning of the year before we ever got to Daytona that the only way to really be comfortable at any point before playoffs was a

win," Buescher said.

Kyle Busch, who won his first stage of the season Sunday and finished fourth, is among the drivers who have to win to get in.

Austin Dillon will be among the desperate drivers, needing to get to a checkered flag first to extend the season, unless he wins an appeal Wednesday or a subsequent option to fight NASCAR's decision to revoke his spot in the playoffs.

Dillon was 17th in the FireKeepers 400, a week after he wrecked Joey Logano and Denny Hamlin on the final lap to win at Richmond.

Reddick, meanwhile, is at the front of the pack in points thanks to his consistency, leading the series with 11 top-five finishes and 17 top 10s out of 24 races.

He also won at Talladega four months ago in his No. 45

Toyota for 23XI, which is owned by Hamlin and Michael Jordan, to put himself and his team No. 1 in points for the first time.

One wreck, as a slew of drivers experienced at Michigan, can change a lot of things in any race and in the standings.

Larson, who was the BetMGM Sportsbook favorite to win the race, lost control of the No. 5 Chevrolet on lap 115 and several cars were tangled up in the mess.

A few laps later, Logano took his damaged No. 22 Ford to the garage and Wallace's No. 23 Toyota took a hit to stunt the relative success the on-the-bubble driver was having in the race.

Wallace finished 26th, pushing him from No. 15 to 17 in the standings for the 16-car field.

# Winker's ninth-inning homer lifts Mets

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Pinch-hitter Jesse Winker led off the ninth inning with his first home run for the New York Mets, giving them another rousing 4-3 victory over the Baltimore Orioles on Wednesday.

Mets starter Sean Manaea retired his first 17 batters and Mark Vientos put New York ahead 3-2 with a solo homer in the seventh.

Francisco Lindor also went deep and J.D. Martinez drove in a run with a grounder to help the Mets take two of three in the series. New York began the day 2½ games behind Atlanta for the final National League playoff berth.

**Red Sox 4, Astros 1:** Rookie Cedanne Rafaela doubled twice with two RBIs and fellow rookie David Hamilton added a solo homer in the ninth inning to lead visiting Boston Red to a win over Houston.

Rafaela's first double off Justin Verlander (3-3) gave Boston a 2-1 lead in the second inning. He drove in another run with a double with two outs in the seventh.

Hamilton's home run to right field off Seth Martinez made it 4-1 with two outs in the ninth.

**Rangers 1, Pirates 0:** Wyatt Langford's single scored pinch-runner Ezequiel Duran with two out in the ninth inning, giving host Texas a win over Pittsburgh.

Jonah Heim and Adolis García singled off David Bednar (3-6) to open Texas' half of the ninth. Duran, running for Heim, advanced to third on a flyout to deep right field by Nathaniel Lowe. Bednar struck out Josh Jung on a 3-2 fastball after García stole second base. Langford then laced an RBI single to center field.

The winning run ended a streak of 22 scoreless innings in the series for the Rangers, who claimed two of three games against the Pirates and ended a string of seven consec-

utive lost series.

Kirby Yates (5-2) pitched a perfect ninth inning for the Rangers, who have won three of their last four games.

**White Sox 6, Giants 2:** Korey Lee hit a tiebreaking two-run single that highlighted a four-run ninth inning as visiting Chicago snapped a four-game skid with a win over San Francisco.

Luis Robert Jr. and Andrew Benintendi drew consecutive walks off Erik Miller (3-4) with one out in the ninth. After Andrew Vaughn reached on an infield single, Miller struck out Gavin Sheets. Then, Lee singled on a 2-2 fastball from Spencer Bivens, giving the White Sox a 4-2 lead. Lenyn Sosa followed with another two-run single to help seal the win.

Robert and Sheets had two hits apiece and Vaughn added two RBIs as MLB-worst Chicago won for just the third time in nine games.

**Nationals 6, Rockies 1:** Mitchell Parker gave up one run and five hits in seven innings, Luis García Jr. hit a three-run homer and host Washington beat Colorado.

James Wood had three hits for the Nationals, who had scored a total of 14 runs while losing five of their past six games. Keibert Ruiz and Andrés Chaparro had two hits each.

Parker (7-7), who gave up nine runs on 10 hits in three innings against the Phillies last time out, walked one and struck out six while throwing 83 pitches. The rookie left-hander has completed seven innings in four of his 23 starts.

Brendan Rodgers and Brenton Doyle each had a double and a single for the Rockies, who had won three of four.

**Yankees 8, Guardians 1:** Aaron Judge homered twice and drove in three runs and Juan Soto hit a two-run homer in the first inning and drove in five to power host New York to a rout

of Cleveland.

Judge hit a two-run homer in the third and added a solo shot in the seventh, upping his major league-leading total to 47. Judge has six homers in his last nine games, 12 in his last 23 games and is on pace to hit 60 home runs.

Nestor Cortes (7-10) pitched seven innings of four-hit ball and gave New York some much-needed length after the Yankees used every reliever Tuesday. The lefty won consecutive starts for the first time since May 17 and 22.

**Twins 11, Padres 4:** Matt Wallner's three-run homer highlighted a seven-run fourth inning as visiting Minnesota beat San Diego.

With the win, Minnesota snapped a three-game skid and avoided a sweep in San Diego. The Twins completed a seven-game trip at 4-3.

The Padres lost for just the seventh time in 29 games.

Minnesota starter Simeon Woods Richardson (5-3) was helped by the Twins' 18-hit attack and won his second straight start. The 23-year-old right-hander blanked the Padres through four innings and allowed a run on three hits, with seven strikeouts and two walks.

**Phillies 3, Braves 2:** Brandon Marsh's tie-breaking pinch-hit sacrifice fly in the eighth inning lifted visiting Philadelphia over Atlanta.

The win pushed the Phillies' lead in the National League East to seven games over the Braves, with five games remaining between the two teams in the regular season.

Weston Wilson went 2-for-3 and scored the winning run in the eighth after leading off with a double. Kyle Schwarber and Trea Turner each had an RBI for the Phillies.

Phillies starter Aaron Nola pitched 5½ innings, giving up two runs on eight hits and two walks. He struck out five.

Matt Strahm (5-2) pitched a scoreless seventh to pick up the win.

Carlos Estévez earned his 22nd save, stranding runners on second and third to end the game.

**Diamondbacks 10, Marlins 8:** Corbin Carroll and Lourdes Gurriel Jr. homered to help Eduardo Rodriguez and visiting Arizona beat Miami.

Arizona, which finished with four hits, improved to a major league-best 30-13 since July 1. Carroll also singled and scored on Joc Pederson's base hit, and Geraldo Perdomo walked twice.

Rodriguez allowed one run and six hits over 5½ innings in his third start of the season since being activated from the injured list on Aug. 7. Rodriguez (2-0) struck out five and walked one.

Ryan Thompson, A.J. Puk and Justin Martinez combined for 3½ innings of one-hit ball after Rodriguez departed. Martinez worked a perfect ninth for his fourth save in five opportunities.

**Royals 3, Angels 0:** Michael Lorenzen pitched seven shutout innings, MJ Melendez homered and host Kansas City beat Los Angeles for its sixth win in seven games.

The Royals spoiled the season debut of Johnny Cueto (0-1), a 17-year veteran who helped Kansas City win the 2015 World Series.

Cueto hadn't pitched in the majors since Sept. 27 last year with the Marlins. He signed a minor league contract with the Angels in July, and was called up from Triple-A Salt Lake earlier Wednesday. He allowed three runs on eight hits and two walks in 6½ innings and left the mound to an ovation from the Kansas City crowd.

Lorenzen (7-6) allowed four hits, two walks, a hit batter and struck out five. He only allowed two runners to reach scoring position.