

Admiral: US has options for gray zone

Associated Press

BAGUIO, Philippines — American forces are ready with a “range of options” to deal with increasing acts of aggression in the disputed South China Sea if ordered to carry them out jointly and after consultations with treaty ally the Philippines, a U.S. admiral said Thursday.

U.S. Indo-Pacific Command chief Adm. Samuel Paparo, who heads the biggest number of combat forces outside the U.S. mainland, refused to provide details of the contingency options.

Paparo’s comments came when asked at a news conference what the longtime treaty allies could do to deal with China’s so-called gray-zone tactics in the disputed waters.

The “gray-zone tactics” refer to types of assault, like water cannon fire and the blocking and ramming of rival ships in the disputed waters, that are under the threshold of an actual armed attack and wouldn’t allow the Philippines to invoke its 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty with the U.S. The treaty obligates either country to help the other in case of an armed external attack.

“We certainly have prepared a range of options and USINDO-PACOM stands ready, if so called, after consultations in accordance with the treaty to execute those shoulder to shoulder with our ally,” Paparo said.

Detailing those U.S. military options would allow “the potential adversary” to “build a countermeasure to those,” he said.

Paparo held a joint news conference with Armed Forces of the Philippines chief Gen. Romero Brawner Jr., after both led an annual meeting in the northern Philippine mountain city of Baguio to discuss security challenges and military plans. They include Balikatan — Tagalog for shoulder to shoulder — the treaty allies’ largest combat exercises, which in April involved more than 16,000 American and Filipino forces and were partly staged in the South China Sea.

In response to a question, Paparo repeated that the U.S. military is open, after treaty consultations with the Philippines, to escorting Philippine ships in the South China Sea amid a spike in hostilities between Beijing and Manila in the disputed waters. Such a prospect would risk putting U.S. Navy

ships in direct collisions with those of China.

Washington and Beijing have been on a collision course over China’s increasingly assertive actions to defend its territorial claims in the South China Sea, and Beijing’s stated goal of annexing Taiwan, by force if necessary.

Brawner said the Philippines could still fend for itself in the disputed waters, where hostilities with the Chinese coast guard, navy and suspected militia ships have alarmingly spiked since last year.

“If we exhaust all the options and nothing works, then that’s the time we can ask for help,” Brawner told reporters.

When Filipino forces in the disputed waters “are at the verge of dying,” because food supplies were being blocked by Chinese forces, “then that’s the time that we are going to seek the help of the United States,” Brawner said, but added that “we still have a lot of options.”

During combat exercises by U.S. and Philippine forces in April, the U.S. military transported a mid-range missile system to the northern Philippines, angering China, which warned

that the missile system can trigger a regional arms race and endanger regional stability. Beijing demanded that the U.S. missile system, which can threaten mainland China, be pulled out of the Philippines.

Paparo and Brawner refused to say on Thursday if and when the missile system would be flown out of the Philippines. Brawner thanked the U.S. military for transporting the high-tech weaponry to the country, saying Filipino forces were being exposed to advance defense equipment that the Philippine military plan to acquire in the future.

“Just like what we did with the Stingers and with the Javelins, we start training already even if we don’t have them yet in our inventory,” Brawner said.

China has angered the Philippines by repeatedly harassing its navy and coast guard ships with powerful water cannons, a military-grade laser, blocking movements and other dangerous maneuvers in the high seas near two disputed South China Sea shoals. They have led to minor collisions that have injured several Filipino navy personnel.

Shipbuilder to settle accounting fraud probe

Associated Press

MOBILE, Ala. — Austal USA, an Alabama-based shipbuilder that makes vessels for the U.S. Navy, has admitted wrongdoing and agreed to pay a \$24 million fine to settle an accounting fraud investigation, the U.S. Department of Justice announced Tuesday.

From 2013 through July 2016, Austal USA conspired to

mislead shareholders and investors about the company’s financial condition, the department said. The company pleaded guilty to one count of securities fraud and one count of obstruction of a federal audit.

Austal USA “engaged in a years-long scheme to illegally inflate its profits on ships the company was building for the U.S. Navy, reporting false fi-

nancial results to investors, lenders, and its auditors,” Nicole M. Argentieri, principal deputy assistant attorney general and head of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division, said in a statement.

Austal USA LLC is a subsidiary of Australia-based Austal Limited and builds littoral combat ships for the Navy that are designed to operate in shal-

low coastal waters.

The Justice Department said Austal artificially lowered cost estimates, despite rising shipbuilding costs, to meet its revenue budget and projections. That had the impact of falsely overstating Austal USA’s profitability on the ships and Austal Limited’s earnings reported in its public financial statements.

Japanese mayor supports Osprey plan

By SETH ROBSON
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

The mayor of a Japanese city, saying he was assured of the Osprey's safety, has signed off on a U.S. Navy plan to put tiltrotors at the neighboring Marine Corps base.

Iwakuni Mayor Yoshihiko Fukuda at a city meeting Wednesday accepted the Navy's plan to replace aging C-2A Greyhound transports with CMV-22 Ospreys at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, a spokesperson for the city's base affairs office said Thursday.

Some Japanese government officials may speak to the press only on condition of anonymity.

The Navy in July said it will replace squadrons of Greyhounds and F/A-18 Super Hornet fighters at MCAS Iwakuni, just south of Hiroshima, with Ospreys and F-35C Lightning II stealth fighters.

By year's end, four CMV-22s assigned to Fleet Logistics Multi-Mission Squadron 30, the service's first Osprey squadron, will take over for Fleet Logistics Squadron 30, which flies the Greyhounds, according to the Navy.

The Ospreys will move personnel and cargo to and from the aircraft carrier USS George Washington, which is due to arrive at Yokosuka Naval Base, its new homeport south of Yokohama, later this year.

"We were able to confirm that this aircraft model update will not significantly affect the living environment of the residents living around the base," Fukuda said at the meeting, according to video posted online by public broadcaster NHK.

Fukuda decided that the Osprey's presence is necessary, considering the security envi-

ronment surrounding Japan, the base affairs official said.

The city concluded that noise won't increase since fewer aircraft will be flying from the air station under the modernization plan, the official said.

Japan's government informed Iwakuni officials last month of the plan to deploy the Ospreys, he said.

The city government concluded the Ospreys are safe, based on their accident record and assurances from the U.S. and Japanese governments, according to a statement posted on the city's website on Aug. 22.

III MEF's logistics arm gets new commander on Okinawa

By BRIAN McELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

CAMP KINSER, Okinawa — Command of the support arm for the Marine Corps' rapid response force in the Indo-Pacific is now in the hands of a general on his third Okinawa tour.

Brig. Gen. Kevin Collins assumed command of the 3rd Marine Logistics Group from Brig. Gen. Adam Chalkley during a ceremony Thursday at the consolidated club on Camp Kinser, the group's headquarters. About 220 Marines, family, Japanese troops and other guests packed the club.

The group provides combat logistics support to the III Marine Expeditionary Force and other Marines in the region. This includes supply, maintenance, transportation, engineering, health services and other services for Marines during exercises and other operations.

Lt. Gen. Roger Turner, III MEF commander, highlighted Chalkley's leadership through the latest phase of the Corps'

Force Design plan.

"I think everybody knows that this MLG has really been one of the centerpieces of the Marine Corps' Force Design as we started to morph what we were doing as a service to what we're going to do going forward," he said at the ceremony. "And this is really the centerpiece of that, and your leadership of that change has been difficult and hard, and I just appreciate the way you've approached it."

During Chalkley's tenure, the logistic group's Marines began testing a 3D-printing unit in shipping containers made to drop into austere locations like jungles to fill supply line gaps. The testing is part of the Force Design plan for rapid movement and reduced demand on supply lines.

Collins said he plans to lead the group through continuing changes in the security situation on Okinawa and in the Pacific. He was last stationed on the island six years ago, he said.

US Army wins international Call of Duty military event

By BRIAN BOWERS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Army captured bragging rights as the year's top military Call of Duty team, defeating squads from the U.S., U.K. and Canadian armed services.

While the U.S. Marine Corps' team claimed a win in the final of four matches, the soldiers' consistent play earned them the Call of Duty Endowment Bowl's glittering trophy, which was presented by Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Eric M. Smith.

The most valuable player was Army Staff Sgt. Monsef Taj, but he shared the credit.

"My teammates went crazy," Taj said, with trophy in hand. "... We had the vibes. We had the chemistry going. We were unstoppable."

Call of Duty Endowment Bowl V featured the first-person shooter's Warzone multiplayer mode. The event was also used to promote the franchise's upcoming Call of Duty:

Black Ops 6.

The event was organized by the Call of Duty Endowment, which was established in 2009 to help fund veteran employment efforts. It has helped place 125,000 vets in new jobs, according to its website.

The esports teams were from the U.S. Army, Air Force, Space Force, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, and the British Army, Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and Royal Canadian Air Force.

The CODE Bowl is an annual competition. Last year, the Royal Canadian Air Force joined the tournament and emerged victorious. In 2022, Britain's Royal Air Force claimed the trophy. And in 2021, Space Force won and celebrated by sending the trophy into space.

On Wednesday, each service fielded two teams, each with two service members and one big-league streamer — except for the Marines, who received assistance from country star Kane Brown.

Justices rebuff plea on student debt plan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Wednesday kept on hold the latest multibillion-dollar plan from the Biden administration that would have lowered payments for millions of borrowers, while lawsuits make their way through lower courts.

The justices rejected an administration request to put most of it back into effect. It was blocked by the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

In an unsigned order, the court said it expects the appeals court to issue a fuller decision on the plan “with appropriate dispatch.”

The Education Department is seeking to provide a faster path to loan cancellation, and reduce monthly income-based repayments from 10% to 5% of a borrower’s discretionary income. The plan also wouldn’t require

borrowers to make payments if they earn less than 225% of the federal poverty line — \$32,800 a year for a single person.

Last year, the Supreme Court’s conservative majority rejected an earlier plan that would have wiped away more than \$400 billion in student loan debt.

Cost estimates of the new SAVE plan vary. The Republican-led states challenging the plan peg the cost at \$475 billion over 10 years. The administration cites a Congressional Budget Office estimate of \$276 billion.

Two separate legal challenges to the SAVE plan have been making their way through federal courts. In June, judges in Kansas and Missouri issued separate rulings that blocked much of the administration’s plan. Debt that already had been forgiven under

the plan was unaffected.

The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals issued a ruling that allowed the department to proceed with a provision allowing for lower monthly payments. Republican-led states had asked the high court to undo that ruling.

But after the 8th Circuit blocked the entire plan, the states had no need for the Supreme Court to intervene, the justices noted in a separate order issued Wednesday.

The Justice Department had suggested the Supreme Court could take up the legal fight over the new plan now, as it did with the earlier debt forgiveness plan. But the justices declined to do so.

“This is a recipe for chaos across the student loan system,” said Mike Pierce, executive director of the Student Borrower

Protection Center, an advocacy group.

“No court has decided on the merits here, but despite all of that, borrowers are left in this limbo state where their rights don’t exist for them,” Pierce said.

Eight million people were already enrolled in the SAVE program when it was paused by the lower court, and more than 10 million more are looking for ways to afford monthly payments, he said.

Sheng Li, litigation counsel with the New Civil Liberties Alliance, a legal group funded by conservative donors, applauded the order. “There was no basis to lift the injunction because the Department of Education’s newest loan-cancellation program is just as unlawful as the one the Court struck down a year ago,” he said in a statement.

Ex-politician convicted of killing journalist in Vegas

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — A Democratic former politician was found guilty of murder on Wednesday by a Nevada jury that decided he’ll serve 20 years to life in prison for killing an investigative journalist who wrote articles critical of his conduct in office two years ago.

Robert Telles hung his head as his verdict was read in Clark County District Court. Jurors deliberated for nearly 12 hours over three days before their unanimous vote that he ambushed and attacked Las Vegas Review-Journal reporter Jeff German outside German’s home.

Telles’ defense attorney, Robert Draskovich, told reporters outside court that his client plans to appeal.

Telles, 47, was returned in custody to jail, where he has been held without bail since his

arrest several days after German’s body was found during Labor Day weekend 2022. His sentencing was scheduled for Oct. 16.

Jessica Coleman, a county employee, was among several co-workers who urged German in 2022 to investigate Telles’ conduct heading the office of unclaimed estate and probate property cases. She sobbed after the verdict was read.

“Finally. Finally,” Coleman said after sitting with other co-workers through the trial, which started Aug. 12. “Finally the system is working.”

German, 69, spent 44 years covering crime, courts and corruption in Las Vegas.

Telles, an attorney, practiced civil law before he was elected in 2018. He lost his primary for a second term after German’s stories were published in May and June 2022.

Congresswomen press FDA on hair product ban delays

Associated Press

Two U.S. House members who first pushed the Food and Drug Administration in 2023 to investigate the health risks of hair straighteners used primarily by Black women are now asking the agency why it has twice delayed its target date to propose a ban on products containing formaldehyde, which studies link to increased rates of cancer.

Democratic Reps. Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts and Shontel Brown of Ohio pressed the FDA in a letter to finalize the proposed rule for banning certain salon-grade and at-home hair straighteners. Rep. Nydia Velazquez of New York joined Pressley and Brown in spearheading the letter, which was dated Tuesday.

The FDA gave notice of a possible rule in 2023 with an initial target date to release the proposal in April. That was then moved

to July before jumping to September.

The letter from Pressley, Brown and Velazquez — all of whom are up for re-election this year — asks FDA Commissioner Robert Califf to provide specific reasons for the delay.

It isn’t uncommon for the FDA to have items on the regulatory agenda for years. For example, the draft of a proposed ban on menthol cigarettes came out in 2022, but the target date on finalizing the rule was pushed back twice before it was indefinitely delayed in April.

When asked about the letter, an FDA spokesperson told the AP that agency officials would respond directly to lawmakers. Last month, the agency said the proposed ban was still among its top priorities and in the rulemaking process, but couldn’t comment to the AP on the timing or content of the proposal.

Ukraine's military says 1 of its F-16s has crashed

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — One of the handful of F-16 warplanes that Ukraine has received from its Western partners to help fight Russia's invasion has crashed, Ukraine's air force said Thursday.

The fighter jet went down on Monday, when Russia launched a major missile and drone barrage at Ukraine, a military statement posted on Facebook said. Four of those Russian missiles were shot down by F-16s, the statement said.

The crash was the first reported loss of an F-16 in Ukraine, where they arrived at the end of last month. At least six of the warplanes are believed to have been

delivered.

The Defense Ministry has opened the investigation into the crash.

Earlier Thursday, Russia conducted a heavy aerial attack on Ukraine for the third time in four days, again launching missiles and scores of drones that mostly were intercepted, Ukraine's air force said.

Russian forces fired five missiles and 74 Shahed drones at Ukrainian targets, an air force statement said. Air defenses stopped two missiles and 60 drones, and 14 other drones presumably fell before reaching their target, it said.

Authorities in the capital, Kyiv, said debris of destroyed drones fell in three districts of the city,

causing minor damage to civilian infrastructure but no injuries.

Russia's relentless and unnerving long-range strikes on civilian areas have been a feature of the war since it invaded its neighbor in February 2022.

Ukrainian officials have recently become more vocal in their long-standing insistence that Western countries supporting their war effort should scrap restrictions on what Ukraine is allowed to target inside Russia with long-range weapons they have provided.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy renewed his pleas for Western allies to untie his hands in deciding what to strike on Russian soil.

Israel kills prominent militant in West Bank

Associated Press

TULKAREM, West Bank — The Israeli military said it killed five more militants, including a local commander, early Thursday in the West Bank as it pressed ahead with what appeared to be the deadliest military operation in the occupied territory since the start of the war in Gaza.

Israel says the simultaneous raids across the northern West Bank — which have killed a total of 16 people, nearly all militants, since late Tuesday — are aimed at preventing attacks. The Palestinians see them as a widening of the Israel-Hamas war aimed at perpetuating Israel's decades-long military rule over the territory.

The Islamic Jihad militant group confirmed that Mohammed Jaber, known as Abu Shujaa, was killed during a raid in the city of Tulkarem. He became a hero for many Palestinians earlier in the year when he was reported killed in an Israeli operation, only to make a surprise appearance at the funeral of other militants, where he was hoisted onto the shoulders of a cheering crowd.

The military said he was killed Thursday along with four other militants in a shootout with Israeli forces after the five had hidden inside a mosque. It said Abu Shujaa was linked to numerous attacks on Israelis, including a deadly shooting in June, and was planning more.

The army also said another militant was arrested in the operation in Tulkarem, and that a member of Israel's paramilitary Border Police was lightly wounded.

Israel launched a large-scale operation in the West Bank overnight into Wednesday.

Houthi video footage shows the rebels placed bombs on oil tanker in Red Sea

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Yemen's Houthi rebels released footage on Thursday showing their fighters boarded and placed explosives on a Greek-flagged tanker, setting off blasts that put the Red Sea at risk of a major oil spill. The vessel was abandoned earlier, after the Houthis repeatedly attacked it.

In the video, the Iran-backed Houthis chant their motto as the bombs detonated aboard the oil tanker Sounion: "God is the greatest; death to America; death to Israel; curse the Jews; victory to Islam."

The blasts capped the most-serious attack in weeks by the Houthis in their campaign disrupting the \$1 trillion in goods that pass through the Red Sea each year over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip, as

well as halting some aid shipments to conflict-ravaged Sudan and Yemen.

The Sounion carried some 1 million barrels of oil when the Houthis initially attacked it on Aug. 21 with small arms fire, projectiles and a drone boat. A French destroyer operating as part of the European Union's Operation Aspides rescued the Sounion's crew of 25 Filipinos and Russians, as well as four private security personnel, after they abandoned the vessel and took them to nearby Djibouti.

The footage released Thursday shows masked Houthi fighters carrying Kalashnikov-style rifles boarding the Sounion after it was abandoned. The bridge appeared ransacked. Fighters then rigged explosives over hatches on its deck leading to the oil tankers below. At least

six simultaneous blasts could be seen in the footage.

The Houthi-controlled SABA news agency described al-Houthi as saying the Sounion attack shows America "is lying in its claims regarding any deterrence of Yemeni operations supporting Palestine."

"The effectiveness of our operations and their control of the situation is acknowledged by the enemies," al-Houthi said.

Western countries and the United Nations have warned any oil spill from the Sounion could devastate the coral reefs and wildlife that call the Red Sea home. The U.S. State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment over the new Houthi footage. However, the EU's naval force in the region says it has yet to see any oil spill from the Sounion.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Angry over home sale,
man kills his family, self**

NY SYOSSET — A New York man distraught that he was being forced to move from his late mother's home shot and killed four of his family members before taking his own life, police said Monday.

Joseph DeLucia Jr. and his family had gathered shortly before noon on Sunday in his mother's home in Syosset, about 30 miles east of Manhattan on suburban Long Island, just three days after laying the matriarch to rest. But instead of discussing the planned sale of the home, where DeLucia also lived, the 59-year-old fired 12 rounds from a shotgun he'd obtained, killing his three siblings and a niece, according to Nassau County Police Capt. Stephen Fitzpatrick.

DeLucia then walked out to the front lawn of the cul-de-sac street, screamed about what he had just done and turned the gun on himself, he said.

Police said Monday his family had assured him they would provide for him after his mother's death, but that he would have to move elsewhere.

**City's former CFO gets 3
years in corruption probe**

GA ATLANTA — A former top official during Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed's administration was sentenced Tuesday to three years in prison under a federal corruption probe that ensnared nearly a dozen people on bribery or other related charges.

U.S. District Judge Steve C. Jones also ordered Jimmie "Jim" A. Beard, 60, of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., to serve three

years of supervised release following his prison term and pay restitution of \$177,197 plus a \$10,000 fine.

Prosecutors said Beard charged luxury trips to a city credit card, double-dipped on travel reimbursements, cheated on his taxes and used the auspices of the city police department to buy a pair of custom-built machine guns otherwise unavailable to civilians.

Beard was Atlanta's chief financial officer from 2011 to 2018. He pleaded guilty in April to diverting government funds and lying to the IRS. Six counts were dropped in a plea deal.

**Dog breeder is killed;
search is on for puppies**

CO IDAHO SPRINGS — Authorities are investigating the killing of a Colorado dog breeder and trying to find as many as 10 Doberman puppies missing from his business.

Investigators have not determined a motive for last week's killing of Paul Peavey, 57, but finding the puppies could help solve his homicide, the Clear Creek Sheriff's Office said Monday in an update on the investigation posted on Facebook.

Peavey was last heard from on Aug. 19 and his body was found on Saturday by a privately organized search party, the sheriff's office said. It did not say where Peavey's body was found or how he was killed.

Peavey's dog breeding business in Idaho Springs promised to deliver "quality over quantity" and offered to provide buyers with 7-month-old trained Doberman puppies. His latest litter was born in mid-July, according to his website, so

the missing puppies could be younger than seven months.

The missing puppies have microchips linking them to Peavey's business, the sheriff's office said.

**Fleeing driver crashes
into police car, kills 1**

CA SAN DIEGO — A San Diego police officer was killed and another was critically injured when a speeding vehicle crashed into their patrol car, the police chief said Tuesday. The speeding driver also was killed.

The crash occurred late Monday after a vehicle was spotted traveling at high speed on a boulevard. An officer tried to make a traffic stop, but the vehicle did not stop, and a brief pursuit began, Chief Scott Wahl told reporters.

"Due to a high rate of speed, a supervisor terminated that pursuit," he said. "Two officers working together in one vehicle were responding to that fleeing suspect, and ultimately the suspect vehicle collided at a high rate of speed into the side of their vehicle."

The officer who was driving died at the scene, and the other officer was hospitalized in intensive care.

**Judge: County broke law
by hiding info on votes**

PA HARRISBURG — A Republican-controlled county in Pennsylvania violated state law when election workers refused to tell voters that their mail-in ballot had been rejected and wouldn't be counted in last April's primary election, a judge ruled.

As a result, voters in Washington County were unable to

exercise their legal right either to challenge the decision of the county elections board or to cast a provisional ballot in place of the rejected mail-in ballot, the judge said. The decision is one of several election-related lawsuits being fought in Pennsylvania's courts, a hotly contested presidential battleground where November's contest between Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Kamala Harris could be razor close.

The NAACP branch in Washington, Pa., sued the county this summer as did seven voters whose ballots had been rejected in the April 23 primary and the Center for Coalfield Justice, accusing Washington County of violating the constitutional due process rights of voters.

**Suspect arrested after
he falls through ceiling**

TN MEMPHIS — A suspect in a fatal shooting in Tennessee was arrested after he fell through the ceiling of a home where he was hiding, authorities said.

Deario Wilkerson, 20, was arrested Monday in Memphis by a U.S. Marshals Service task force that looks for fugitives in West Tennessee. Wilkerson had been charged with first-degree murder and reckless endangerment with a deadly weapon in the fatal shooting of Troy Cunningham in Memphis on April 2, the Marshals Service said in a news release.

The task force had tracked Wilkerson to a home. Wilkerson, who was hiding in the attic, was arrested after he fell through the ceiling, the Marshals Service said. He was not hurt.

— From wire reports

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No. 14 Clemson takes on No. 1 Georgia

Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. — Barrett Carter came to Clemson for championships, not to listen to narratives of a fading program no longer capable of national titles.

The All-American linebacker can't wait for the 14th-ranked Tigers' chance to put that to rest when they open against No. 1 Georgia in Atlanta on Saturday.

"Tired of the disrespect," said Carter, who leads a defense that finished eighth nationally a season ago. "Tired of all the negative stuff. Just ready to show what we know we can do as a team. We're ready to showcase that."

Carter and the Tigers realize the strides they can make on Saturday. Win and the group is an instant big-picture contender closer to the powerhouse that made six straight College Football Playoffs from 2015-2020 and won it all after the 2016 and 2018 seasons.

Lose and the outside perception from many about Clemson's downward spiral continues — a

program whose best days are done and a coach in Dabo Swinney who can't (or won't) adapt to the sport's rapid changes.

Carter and his teammates believe they can get themselves back among the preeminent programs in the game.

"We're not the underdog. We're just laying low right now," said tight end Jake Briningstool, despite Clemson coming in a 13½-point underdog, according to BetMGM Sportsbook.

Changing path

Carter was a freshman when Clemson opened against Georgia in 2021, fresh off the Tigers' sixth straight Atlantic Coast Conference title and CFP appearance.

Led by quarterback DJ Uiagalelei, the team again looked like it would steamroll the league and get another crack at the national title.

Instead, Georgia's defense shut down Uiagalelei and the Tigers in a 10-3 victory. While the Bulldogs went on to win the first of two straight national titles,

Clemson lost twice more by mid-October to fall from contention.

After winning the ACC in 2022 but missing the CFP, Clemson imploded amid way too many mistakes by first-year starting quarterback Cade Klubnik and critical injuries to players like tailback Will Shipley and receivers Beaux Collins and Antonio Williams. The Tigers were 4-4 before November.

Some have seized on Swinney's reluctance to use the transfer portal to shore up areas of need like receiver and offensive line from last year.

Swinney has stood firm in his stance to rely on his recruits and how he and his staff develop them.

"If something happens, he's not just going to bring somebody in," safety R.J. Mickens said this summer. "He's going to wait on somebody and give somebody a chance that's been there and not been able to play."

Swinney said he looked at some offensive linemen in the

portal, but nothing materialized. "They've got to love you, too," he quipped.

Georgia coach Kirby Smart agrees with Swinney in portal principle. "If I could keep my entire roster my roster, I'd be all for keeping my roster my roster," Smart said this week.

But Smart acknowledges that's "not realistic" in today's college football world.

Preparing players

Swinney has liked how his roster has prepared this summer. The players understand that Georgia is the national title favorite for a reason and his team will need to match all that the Bulldogs have to pull off the upset.

"I think we've got a committed team," said Swinney, who starts his 17th season as Clemson coach.

Swinney also drove home the message that the season won't hinge on what happens this week. The Tigers, even in defeat, can still win the ACC and earn a CFP berth.

Miami, Florida collide for first time since 2019

Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Even though he grew up in Miami and kept close tabs on the Hurricanes, Florida cornerback Jason Marshall knows little about the once-heated rivalry involving the two Sunshine State teams.

The Florida Flop? The Peach Pelting? The Bourbon Street Brawl?

Marshall hasn't heard of any of them. He knows the Gators won two of the last three matchups, in 2008 and 2019. Much of his knowledge comes from watching highlights designed to educate Florida players on the history of the game that peaked as one of the nation's best in the 1980s.

What stood out?

"I would say just the nastiness

that both teams have toward each other," Marshall said. "Like, there's hate there."

No. 19 Miami and Florida will open their seasons in Gainesville on Saturday, ushering in a new chapter in a series that provided several instant classics and plenty of hard feelings over eight-plus decades.

Many believe it should be an annual occurrence, a debate ignited every time they land on each other's schedule.

"This is the real deal, the good ol' days," former Miami center and longtime radio broadcaster Don Bailey Jr. said. "When it was going every year, it was the most important game on the schedule. Period."

It's been one-sided of late, with the Hurricanes winning seven of

nine and 12 of 17.

No one on either roster played in the last meeting five years ago, so even though most of them crossed paths in high school and on recruiting trails, they share little animosity. And the coaches, Miami's Mario Cristobal and Florida's Billy Napier, are friends who spent four years as offensive assistants together at Alabama (2013-16) under Nick Saban.

The rivalry has a rich history, complete with cakewalks, comebacks and controversy.

The 2003 game was one for the ages. Brock Berlin rallied Miami from a 23-point deficit to stun the Gators. It ranks right up there with right-hander George Mira's left-handed pass to beat Florida in 1961 and fullback James

Jones' falling-backward, one-handed TD catch in the closing minutes to seal a victory for the Gators in 1982.

For the Gators, the game played annually between 1938 and 1987 never reached the heights of Southeastern Conference rivalries Georgia and Auburn or the annual affair with Florida State.

So Florida dropped Miami in 1988 because it wanted to play a "more national schedule." The Gators promptly replaced the Hurricanes with Montana State. Coach Steve Spurrier boasted about wanting Miami back on the schedule when he returned to his alma mater in 1990.

"I was just trying to be real brave," Spurrier admitted last week.

US men Tiafoe, Shelton to meet at US Open

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Frances Tiafoe is getting the rematch he wants, a second shot at Ben Shelton at the U.S. Open.

But there won't be a second straight Grand Slam title for Barbora Krejčíková.

The Wimbledon champion was knocked out in the second round Wednesday, defeated by Elena-Gabriela Ruse 6-4, 7-5.

The No. 8-seeded Krejčíková won her second Grand Slam singles title this summer, but then didn't play after the Olympics. She acknowledged not knowing where her level of play was.

Turns out, it wasn't good enough.

"I mean, winning Wimbledon is amazing. It's a great, great, great result, I'm very proud about it and how I was able to handle everything there," said Krejčíková, who hadn't played a tournament on hard courts since February.

No woman has won Wimble-

don and the U.S. Open in the same year since Serena Williams in 2012.

Tiafoe had short work on the steamiest day of the tournament thus far, with temperatures in New York surpassing 90 degrees. Three men's matches ended when an opponent stopped playing, the last one sending defending champion Novak Djokovic to the third round when Laslo Djere retired early in the third set with what appeared to be pain near his hip after they played for more than two hours in the first two sets.

"You know, in the end, not the kind of finish that we players or crowd wants to see, but I think it's probably due to that physical battle that we had in the opening two sets," No. 2-seeded Djokovic said.

Tiafoe, the No. 20 seed, won the first two sets before his opponent, Alexander Shevchenko, retired after the first game of the third set.

Shelton, the No. 13 seed, later beat Roberto Bautista Agut 6-3, 6-4, 6-4. He ousted Tiafoe last year in the quarterfinals, stopping him from what would've been a second straight trip to the U.S. Open semifinals.

"Obviously he's very much like me in how excited and energetic he is on the court," Tiafoe said, "and has such a big game and big shots and serves big and gets the crowd going."

They were two of the four American men to reach the third round in the bottom half of the draw. No. 12 Taylor Fritz got there by beating Matteo Berrettini 6-3, 7-6 (1), 6-1, while Brandon Nakashima beat Arthur Cazaux and will next play No. 18 Lorenzo Musetti, the bronze medalist at the Olympics.

Defending champion Coco Gauff marched into the third round on the women's side with a 6-4, 6-0 victory over Tatjana Maria. The No. 3 seed will next face No. 27 seed Elina Svitolina.

Ruse, from Romania, advanced to the third round of a Grand Slam for the first time and will play No. 26 seed Paula Badosa, who eliminated American Taylor Townsend 6-3, 7-5.

Jiri Lehecka ignored the heat to engineer the biggest comeback of his career, rallying to beat Mitchell Krueger 6-7 (5), 0-6, 6-4, 6-4, 7-5 in a match that finished a minute shy of four hours. Lehecka, the No. 32 seed, not only came from two sets down for the first time in his career, but he was even down 3-0 in the third set against the American qualifier.

"I kind of dug back into the match with a big fight, and then the fourth set and fifth set was just a battle and we were both fighting for every point," Lehecka said.

He will face No. 6 seed Andrey Rublev, who also came from two sets down to outlast Arthur Rinderknech 4-6, 5-7, 6-1, 6-2, 6-2.

Steelers handing over offense to veteran QB Wilson

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Pittsburgh Steelers are going to let Russell Wilson cook.

Coach Mike Tomlin announced the nine-time Pro Bowler as the starter Wednesday, putting an end to a largely perfunctory quarterback competition with Justin Fields in which the 35-year-old Wilson held the "pole position" as Tomlin put it for months and did little to cede ground to Fields.

"It was a difficult decision, but not difficult in a negative way," Tomlin said. "The decision was difficult because of what they're capable of doing."

Wilson will be the fourth different Week 1 starting quarterback in as many seasons for the Steelers, who have bounced from Ben Roethlisberger to Mitch Trubisky to Kenny Pickett and now to Wilson, who flamed out in two seasons in Denver but practically sprinted to Pittsburgh in hopes of reviving his career.

"I came here to help us win," Wilson said. "That's the focus."

The Steelers revamped their offense in the offseason, flipping the quarterback

room entirely and hiring former Atlanta head coach Arthur Smith as offensive coordinator.

Wilson, who signed a one-year deal on the first day of free agency, will be tasked with trying to goose up production for a unit that is the main reason Pittsburgh has failed to win a playoff game in eight years, the franchise's longest drought since the "Immaculate Reception" in 1972.

That dry spell is one of the reasons the Steelers made such an abrupt shift at the most important position on the field. Tomlin and general manager Omar Khan said repeatedly over the winter that they were all in on Pickett, a first-round pick in 2022.

Things changed quickly — very quickly — after Wilson was brought in to provide competition. Pittsburgh traded Pickett hours after bringing in Wilson. The Steelers then acquired Fields, who endured three uneven seasons in Chicago.

While Fields is a decade younger and is far more mobile than Wilson, Wilson provides experience, an ability to take care of the ball and a reputation as one of the best big-game

quarterbacks of his generation.

"Russ' résumé is a unique one in terms of length and success," Tomlin said. "That tends to play a factor in the decision-making, not from a decision-making perspective, that's just the fruit of his labor. He's seen a lot and done a lot, and I think it was reflected in the way he played and conducted himself."

A calf injury slowed Wilson during training camp, giving Fields more practice reps with the starters.

Tomlin's decision to play coy fueled idle speculation that Fields had a chance to supplant Wilson, but the reality is Tomlin placed Wilson atop the depth chart to start training camp and Fields never came close to unseating him.

The competition such as it was ended in Detroit last Saturday when Wilson led a quick four-play touchdown drive that included a pretty 26-yard flip to George Pickens.

Fields, who like Wilson has said and done all the right things since coming to Pittsburgh, could be featured in certain packages to take advantage of his skillset.

Guardians reclaim first in AL Central

Associated Press

Rookie Jhonkensy Noel singled home Josh Naylor with the go-ahead run in the seventh inning and Cleveland rallied for a win over Kansas City, reclaiming sole possession of first place in the AL Central.

The Guardians trailed 5-2 entering the seventh, but scored four times to take their first lead of the afternoon. Bo Naylor homered off starter Michael Wacha, while Josh Naylor, Will Brennan and Noel had RBI singles against Lucas Erceg (2-4).

Erceg was charged with one run allowed, his first in 12 appearances and 13⅓ innings since joining the Royals in a July 30 trade with Oakland.

Andrés Giménez tacked on a sacrifice fly in the eighth as Cleveland avoided a four-game sweep in the series. The Guardians and rookie manager Stephen Vogt had been alone atop the Central for 154 days until Kansas City pulled into a tie Tuesday.

Cubs 14, Pirates 10: Christian Bethancourt drove in seven runs, including a go-ahead two-run single in the ninth, as visiting Chicago rallied past Pittsburgh to sweep the three-game series.

The Cubs trailed by seven through six innings before taking advantage of another shaky performance by Pittsburgh's bullpen.

Bethancourt hit a two-run homer in the seventh to start Chicago's surge. The catcher added a two-run double in the eighth and laced a sharp bases-loaded single to left against Pirates closer David Bednar (3-7) to complete the comeback.

Astros 10, Phillies 0: Visiting Houston pitcher Spencer Arrighetti lost his no-hit bid against NL East-leading Philadelphia when Austin Hays led off the eighth inning with an infield single.

The 24-year-old rookie right-hander struck out nine and walked four without a hit through seven innings. He had thrown 53

of his 86 pitches for strikes. A sixth-round pick in the amateur draft, Arrighetti entered the game 6-11 with a 4.94 ERA and having allowed 112 hits in 116⅓ innings.

Mariners 6, Rays 2: Victor Robles and Julio Rodríguez each hit a two-run homer in the fifth inning as host Seattle beat Tampa Bay.

Randy Arozarena went deep against his former team again and Luis Castillo pitched 5⅓ solid innings to help the Mariners win two of three in the series. Seattle stayed 3½ games back of first-place Houston in the AL West.

Red Sox 3, Blue Jays 0: Brayan Bello delivered the longest outing of his career, pitching eight innings of two-hit ball to lead host Boston to a shutout of Toronto.

Bello (12-6) struck out nine and walked one to pick up just his second win in eight starts since the All-Star break. The 25-year-old righty had only pitched into the eighth inning once in his career previously, and he had never recorded more than 24 outs.

Athletics 9, Reds 6: Seth Brown hit a pair of home runs, including a go-ahead three-run shot in the eighth, and visiting Oakland beat Cincinnati.

The A's hit four home runs in the game and have homered 166 times this season, seventh-most in the major leagues. Oakland has scored 50.3% of its runs on homers, the highest percentage in the majors.

Nationals 5, Yankees 2: Rookie Dylan Crews led off the game with his first career homer and later hit an RBI double, and host Washington beat New York.

Crews, the third-ranked prospect in baseball who debuted on Monday, lifted a high drive to the bullpen in left-center on Carlos Rodón's second pitch. In the fourth inning, Crews hit a 105.8 mph liner for a double to put Washington ahead 5-1 as his family celebrated in the stands.

Braves 5, Twins 1: Chris Sale

won his major league-leading 15th game with six crisp innings, Jorge Soler homered early and threw out a runner at the plate late, and resurgent Atlanta beat host Minnesota.

Sale (15-3) continued his comeback season by stretching his streak of allowing two earned runs or fewer to 14 straight starts. Sale had six strikeouts to match San Diego's Dylan Cease for the major league lead with 197 this year and set a single-season Braves franchise record for a left-hander.

Brewers 5, Giants 3: Freddy Peralta pitched six scoreless innings, William Contreras capped a five-run fifth inning with a two-run homer and host Milwaukee hung on to beat San Francisco.

Peralta (9-7) allowed two walks and Thairo Estrada's base hit through five innings as the Brewers built a 5-0 lead. The Giants threatened in the sixth with a two-out single by Tyler Fitzgerald and a walk before Peralta struck out Heliot Ramos and let out a scream as he walked from the mound.

Cardinals 4, Padres 3: Nolan Arenado drove in Masyn Winn with two outs in the ninth inning, lifting host St. Louis to a walk-off victory over San Diego.

Winn reached on a single off Robert Suarez (8-2), who came in to pitch the ninth. Rookie Victor Scott II kept the inning alive when he singled Winn to second, before Arenado — who is 13-for-43 in the past 11 games — singled to center.

Tigers 3, Angels 2: Spencer Torkelson hit a two-run home run in the 2nd inning and Kerry Carpenter added an RBI single in the third as host Detroit extended its winning streak to six games with a victory over Los Angeles.

The teams were forced to wait out a lengthy rain delay at the outset for the second straight night. This time, after a delay of 1 hour, 50 minutes, first pitch took place at 8:30 p.m.

Rangers 3-4, White Sox 1-2: Travis Jankowski robbed Andrew Vaughn of a game-winning homer with a leaping catch in the ninth inning, and visiting Texas beat Chicago for its second victory of the day against the majors' worst team.

Corey Seager had four hits, including a tiebreaking single in the ninth, as Texas improved to 6-0 against Chicago this season. Seager also had an RBI single as the Rangers beat the White Sox 3-1 hours earlier in the resumption of a game suspended Tuesday after just four pitches.

Rockies 8, Marlins 2: Kyle Freeland went six innings, Aaron Schunk hit his first major league home run and host Colorado took advantage of four errors to beat Miami.

Nolan Jones hit a pair of RBI singles and Drew Romo added two hits and an RBI for Colorado. Ezequiel Tovar added a two-run double in the bottom of the eighth.

Diamondbacks 9, Mets 5: Corbin Carroll hit a go-ahead grand slam in the eighth inning off Edwin Díaz, part of a two-homer night that lifted host Arizona over New York.

The Diamondbacks trailed 5-4 heading into the eighth, but pulled off a two-out rally against the Mets' closer. Díaz (5-3) entered with a runner on first and promptly walked Pavin Smith and Geraldo Perdomo before Carroll smacked his second homer of the game into the right-field seats.

Dodgers 6, Orioles 4: Teoscar Hernández hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the third inning, Shohei Ohtani went deep leading off the game on his second bobblehead night and host Los Angeles beat Baltimore.

Ohtani singled and scored in the third and scored again in the fifth, giving the Japanese superstar a career-high 104 runs this season, bettering his mark of 103 set in 2021 with the Los Angeles Angels.