

US cautious delivering arms to Ukraine

The Washington Post

NEAR IZYUM, Ukraine — If only they had more, and more sophisticated, weapons from the West, Ukrainian officials often tell their American counterparts and anyone else who will listen, they could make short work of Russian invaders. Last month's arrival of the first of what are now a dozen U.S. multiple-launch precision rocket systems, known as HIMARS, has already been a game-changer, soldiers here said this week.

Since a recent HIMARS strike on an enemy ammunition depot in Izyum, located southeast of Ukraine's second-largest city Kharkiv, Russian shelling has been "10 times less" than before, said Bohdan Dmytruk, a battalion commander in Ukraine's 93rd Mechanized Brigade.

Yet the Biden administration has parceled out the rocket systems slowly, watching how the Ukrainians handle them — and how the Russians respond. To fighters on the ground, that makes little sense at a crucial moment in the war.

In his battalion alone, Dmytruk said, the number of killed and injured has fallen dramatically compared to when his soldiers moved to this part of the front line three months ago. "We have about one guy suffer a concussion every week now. Before the HIMARS hit, it was about two to three a day because of the intensity of the shelling."

Dmytruk and soldiers in the area attributed the drop-off in what was near-constant bombardment to the Russians' need to conserve shells after the depot was destroyed, and their fear that firing their own artillery will alert the far more accurate and agile HIMARS to their positions.

"They have no idea where it is," Dmytruk said of the wheeled launch vehicle and its four-man crew, which can fire and drive away at up to 60 miles per hour within two minutes. Already, he said, the Russians are likely adjusting to the new weapons by moving their supplies deeper into Russian-held territory beyond the 50-mile HIMARS range.

The administration announced Friday that it would send four additional HIMARS — High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems — to Ukraine, bringing the total to 16. Britain and Germany also have each sent or pledged three similar multiple-launch long-range systems. But the Ukrainians and some other close observers of the conflict say the need is far greater and immediate.

Ukrainian government and military officials have said at various times that they need dozens, hundreds or even thousands of HIMARS. "For an effective counteroffensive, we need at least 100," with longer-range munition than what has been supplied, Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said Tuesday in a video appear-

ance at the Washington-based Atlantic Council. "That would be a game-changer."

The provision of security assistance to Ukraine has become a massive operation, involving more than 50 countries. The United States leads the effort, with the most money spent and weapons sent — \$8.2 billion worth since the beginning of the administration, with billions more expected — although others have collectively provided billions worth of light and heavy military equipment. To Washington, confronting Russia with a large and united global front is worth the occasional headaches of coordinating donations from around the world, ensuring equipment is in working order and matches needs on the ground, and seeing that it gets to the right place inside Ukraine.

For some critics, and many Ukrainians, the steps in that process do not always match the urgency of the situation, especially as Russia has said it plans to annex parts of occupied southern Ukraine and made slow but steady progress expanding its hold on the east.

Some argue the objective should be to put Ukraine in a better position for cease-fire negotiations to keep Russia from conquering more territory. Others say the goal of the ally-provided aid, now that the Ukrainians have shown their fighting mettle, should be arming them for a counteroffensive push.

Lavrov: Russian goal is to oust Ukraine president

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia's top diplomat said Moscow's overarching goal in Ukraine is to topple President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's government, expressing the Kremlin's war aims in some of the bluntest terms yet as its forces pummel the country with artillery barrages and airstrikes.

The remark from Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov comes amid Ukraine's efforts to resume grain exports from its Black Sea ports, something that

would help ease global food shortages, under a new deal tested by a Russian strike on Odesa over the weekend.

Speaking to envoys at an Arab League summit in Cairo late Sunday, Lavrov said Moscow is determined to help Ukrainians "liberate themselves from the burden of this absolutely unacceptable regime."

Lavrov accused Kyiv and its Western allies of spouting propaganda intended to ensure that Ukraine "becomes the eternal enemy of Russia."

"Russian and Ukrainian people would continue to live together. We will certainly help Ukrainian people to get rid of the regime, which is absolutely anti-people and anti-historical," he said.

Lavrov's remarks contrasted with the Kremlin's line early in the war, when it repeatedly emphasized that Russia wasn't seeking to overthrow Zelenskyy's government, even as Moscow's troops closed in on Kyiv. Russia later retreated from around the capital and turned its

attention to capturing Ukraine's industrial Donbas region in the east. The fighting is now in its sixth month.

Lavrov argued that Russia was ready to negotiate a deal to end hostilities in March when Kyiv changed tack and declared its intention to rout Russia on the battlefield. He said the West has encouraged Ukraine to keep fighting.

"The West insists that Ukraine must not start negotiations until Russia is defeated on the battlefield," Lavrov said.

Okinawa urges caution as COVID-19 surges

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

Okinawa has declared a local emergency as the island prefecture again paces Japan's record-breaking wave of COVID-19.

"The momentum of the infection has not slowed down, and the further spread of the infection has become a reality," wrote prefectural Gov. Denny Tamaki in a statement Thursday. He cautioned that summer events and vacation crowds would exacerbate the rising coronavirus tide.

The prefectural emergency calls on its population to wear masks, limit outdoor dining to groups of four, refrain from nonessential outings where social distancing cannot be maintained and avoid visiting people who are at risk of serious illness, Tamaki said.

III Marine Expeditionary Force, headquartered on Okinawa, repeated the prefectural announcement Friday and reminded its population to take the same precautions.

"While we are guests in Okinawa, it is also our home," the III MEF said in a Facebook post. "It is the responsibility of each and every one of us to come together and help mitigate the spread of COVID-19."

Hospitals are becoming strained as the number of new patients increases, according to Tamaki. On Sunday, 551 people were hospitalized with COVID-19 on Okinawa, 20 of them with severe symptoms, according to the Okinawa COVID-19 information website.

New cases of COVID-19 are arising faster than they ever have in Japan, which reported 200,870 Saturday, high above

the pandemic peak of 104,345 on Feb. 3 during the omicron wave, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. Japan on Sunday reported 176,492, according to Johns Hopkins.

The BA.2 omicron subvariant was responsible for the surge in new cases in Japan, the country's National Institute of Infectious Diseases reported July 7. However, the institute predicted the BA.4 and 5 subvariants would soon predominate.

"In particular, the BA.5 lineage may become the mainstream lineage in Japan in the future and could be a factor in increasing the number of infected people," according to the institute report.

BA.5 as of mid-July accounts for most of the new cases in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention. It is "the most transmissible variant detected yet," the director general of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said at a media briefing Wednesday.

Okinawa had the highest per capita increase of the 47 prefectures in Japan, the infectious disease institute reported. On Saturday the prefecture reported its highest one-day total of the pandemic, 5,297, according to the COVID-19 information website.

Tokyo on Friday posted 34,995 new cases of coronavirus, its highest one-day total of the pandemic, thus far, according to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. Nearly half, 47%, of the available hospital beds are full for a total of 3,333 patients, of whom 79 have severe symptoms.

Taiwan prepares in case China reacts to Pelosi visit

Associated Press

BEIJING — Taiwan's capital staged air raid drills Monday and its military mobilized for routine defense exercises, coinciding with concerns over a forceful Chinese response to a possible visit to the island by U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.

While there was no direct link between China's renewed threats and Taiwan's defensive moves, they underscore the possibility of a renewed crisis in the Taiwan Strait, considered a potential hot spot for a conflict that could envelop the entire region.

Air raid sirens were sounded in the capital Taipei and the military was holding its annual multi-day Han Kuang drills, including joint air and sea exer-

cises and the mobilization of tanks and troops. In Taipei, police directed people to shelters when a siren went off shortly after lunchtime. Streets emptied and shops closed.

"In recent years, Chinese military planes have frequently harassed Taiwan, and the war between Russia and Ukraine broke out in February this year," Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je told reporters, referencing concerns that a similar conflict could break out in East Asia. "All these things make us understand the importance of being vigilant in times of peace, and we need to be prepared if there is war."

Pelosi, meanwhile, has not confirmed when, or even if, she will visit.

After 6 years on the run, Army deserter faces charges

The State (Columbia, S.C.)

She was found in the basement of an abandoned "party house" stabbed to death on a chilly October night in South Carolina in 2016.

On Wednesday, Cati Blauvelt's estranged husband John was arrested in Medford, Ore., in connection with her death.

Her mother Pam Piver, of Simpsonville, S.C., said at a news conference Thursday that the years had been unbearable.

"You do lose hope," she said.

But getting the news of Blauvelt's arrest "was the most amazing phone call I've ever gotten," Piver said.

U.S. Marshals and Medford police followed a lead provided by a cold case team from the agency's headquarters, the Marshals office said in a news release. Blau-

velt met his future wife at a sub shop next to where he worked as a recruiter for the U.S. Army.

Cati got her dream job at PetSmart in Simpsonville. That was the last place she was seen, Oct. 24, 2016.

Once it became known she was missing, her friends and family spent hour upon hour looking for her. It was two friends who found her body shortly after midnight Oct. 26, hidden under lumber in the rundown house in the woods just off Main Street in Simpsonville. Blauvelt was an immediate suspect and police tracked him across the country, deep South to West Coast.

Blauvelt is charged with murder and possession of a weapon during a violent crime.

He was classified by the Army as a deserter.

Alaska facing hundreds of rare wildfires

Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Alaska is burning this year in ways rarely or ever seen, from the largest wildfire in a typically mainly fireproof southwest region to a pair of blazes that ripped through forests and produced smoke that blew hundreds of miles to the the Bering Sea community of Nome, where the normally crystal clear air was pushed into the extremely unhealthy category.

More than 530 wildfires have already burned an area the size of Connecticut, and the usual worst of the fire season still lays ahead. While little property has burned, some residents have been forced to evacuate and one

person was killed — a helicopter pilot died last month when he crashed while attempting to carry a load of equipment for firefighters.

Recent rains have helped but longer-term forecasts are showing a pattern similar to 2004, when July rains gave way to high-pressure systems, hot days, low humidity and lightning strikes that fueled Alaska's worst fire year.

In 2004, the acreage burned by mid-July was about the same as now. But by the time that fire season ended, 10,156 square miles were charred.

"The frequency of these big seasons has doubled from what it was in the second half of the 20th

century," said Rick Thoman, a climate specialist with the Alaska Center for Climate Assessment and Policy at the University of Alaska's International Arctic Research Center. "And there's no reason to think that's not going to continue."

Alaska, the nation's largest state, also has been dry. Parts saw an early snow melt and then a largely rain-free June that dried out the duff layer — the band of decaying moss and grasses that blankets the floors of boreal forests and the tundra. This organic matter can be up to 2 feet thick but in various stages of decay.

On May 31, a lightning strike on the duff layer in the Yukon-

Kuskokwim Delta started the East Fork fire, an area in southwest Alaska that rarely burns. Two communities with a combined population of about 700 were threatened, but no mandatory evacuations were ordered in what became the largest wildfire ever in the delta at 259 square miles. Firefighters were able to protect the communities.

A fire like that one was directly attributable to climate change, Thoman said. There's more vegetation growing on the tundra, willow and alder trees are thicker in the transition area between the tundra and forests, and spruce along river valleys are growing thicker and moving farther uphill from those valleys.

Pope apologizes for tactics of assimilation in Canada

Associated Press

MASKWACIS, Alberta — Pope Francis has apologized for the Catholic Church's cooperation with Canada's "devastating" policy of Indigenous residential schools, saying the forced assimilation of Native peoples into Christian society destroyed their cultures, severed their families and marginalized generations in ways still being felt today.

"I humbly beg forgiveness for the evil committed by so many Christians against the Indigenous peoples," Francis said near the site of the former Ermineskin Indian Residential School, now largely torn down, on lands of four Cree nations south of Edmonton, Alberta.

The long-awaited apology opened Francis' weeklong "penitential pilgrimage" to Canada, which is meant to help the church on its path of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and help victims heal.

Francis' words on Monday went beyond his earlier apology for the "deplorable" acts of missionaries and instead took re-

sponsibility for the church's cooperation with the "catastrophic" assimilation policy, which Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has said amounted to a "cultural genocide."

When Francis arrived at the site Monday, he prayed at a cemetery near the site of the former school before being escorted by four chiefs to a gathering of thousands of Indigenous peoples. After a traditional Indigenous hand drummer played and sang to welcome Francis, the pope prayed in silence and the sun peeked out after a morning of rain.

One of the hosts of the event, Chief Randy Ermineskin of the Ermineskin Cree Nation, waited for the pope in a nearby parking lot and took stock of the historic import of the day.

"My late family members are not here with us anymore, my parents went to residential school, I went to residential school," he told The Associated Press, dressed in a traditional feathered Cree headdress. "I know they're with me, they're listening, they're watching."

Alleged Abe assassin will undergo mental evaluation

Associated Press

TOKYO — The alleged assassin of Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will be detained until late November for mental evaluation so prosecutors can determine whether to formally press charges and send him to trial for murder, officials said Monday.

The suspect, Tetsuya Yamagami, was arrested immediately after he allegedly shot Abe from behind when the former leader was making a campaign speech outside a busy train station in western Japan on July 8.

The Nara District Court said it had granted permission for district prosecutors to detain the suspect for psychiatric examination until Nov. 29, when they must decide whether to file formal charges. His current detention was to expire later this month.

Yamagami, 41, has told police he killed Abe because of his links to a religious group he hated. His reported statements and other evidence suggest he was distressed because his mother's massive donations to the Unifica-

tion Church had bankrupted the family.

Abe's assassination has shed a light on his and his party's decadeslong questionable links to the conservative church.

Members of the country's main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan met Monday and confirmed plans to pursue an investigation into how the church influenced the governing Liberal Democratic Party's objections to a legal change to allow same-sex marriages or for married couples to keep separate surnames.

The party also said it will investigate if the new government's unit for children, to be launched next spring, added "families" as part of its agency name because of the church's pressure.

The church was founded in Seoul in 1954, a year after the end of the Korean War, by the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the self-proclaimed messiah whose teachings are backed by new interpretations of the Bible and conservative, family-oriented value systems as well as strong anti-communism.

Data shows airlines' role in cancellations

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Airline executives, under a barrage of criticism from the public, lawmakers and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, have sought to shift blame for flight troubles this summer onto the nation's air traffic control system. But federal data shows that airlines themselves are the biggest reason for delays in recent months and bear responsibility for an unusually high share of cancellations.

The numbers, reported by airlines and recently released by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, also confirm the experiences of many passengers: 2022 has been a rough year for air travel. Federal transportation officials say 88,161 flights were canceled through May — the second-most in the first five months of a year since 1988, topped only by 2020 during the start of the pandemic.

The jump in flight delays and cancellations — stemming from surging demand in an industry that shed tens of thousands of employees during the pandemic — prompted unusual rounds of public finger-pointing beginning this spring. It came as the nation's airports were recording their busiest days of the pandemic era, prompting unequipped airlines to boost worker pay incentives and pare back schedules.

The industry's criticism of air traffic controllers sparked rebuttals from the Federal Aviation Administration and Buttigieg, reminding passengers of their rights to refunds when airlines cancel flights or subject passengers to extended delays.

While air traffic control officials acknowledge their own pandemic-era challenges, data suggests that those issues haven't played a significant role in this

year's airline struggles.

According to the Transportation Department figures, air carriers were directly responsible for about 41% of delays through May, a figure on par with last year but higher than before the pandemic. Late-arriving aircraft — another problem mostly attributable to airlines — accounted for an additional 37% of delays.

Problems with the nation's airspace, such as congestion, bad weather or staffing at air traffic control facilities, accounted for 17% of delays — the lowest level since officials began tracking the data in 2004. Extreme weather is its own category and accounted for about 5% of delays.

As for cancellations, problems attributed to airlines were cited in 38% of cases, the highest rate since 2012. But the majority of cancellations involve circumstances beyond the carriers' con-

trol. Weather was cited in 55% of cases. National airspace problems, such as those involving air traffic control, accounted for 7% of cancellations.

Buttigieg said there are signs that air travel is becoming more reliable, even with cancellation rates above acceptable levels.

"What I've emphasized to the airlines is we want to support them when they're doing the right thing. We're also here to enforce the rules when they're not," he said recently. "Anytime there's anything under FAA's control, they will work on it, but I want to be very, very clear here: That is not explaining the majority of delays."

Air traffic controllers and airline managers meet virtually each afternoon to plan the next day's flights, with other meetings at least every two hours to share updates.

Young Republicans like what they hear from Trump, DeSantis

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — When former President Donald Trump took the stage before a crowd of over 5,000 young conservative activists in Tampa on Saturday, he received the rock star's welcome he's grown used to during the seven years he's reshaped the Republican Party.

One night earlier, it was Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis who had the crowd on its feet at Turning Point USA's annual Student Action Summit.

"To be honest, it's like choosing between your favorite child," said Leo Milik, 19, from Barrington, Ill., when asked whom he'd like to see as the party's next nominee.

That sentiment reflects the soul searching inside the GOP as an invisible primary for the 2024 presidential nomination begins to take shape, dominated at least for the moment by Trump and DeSantis.

There's little doubt that Trump is moving closer to announcing a

third presidential campaign. But there's genuine debate over whether he's the party's best candidate to take on President Joe Biden, who is otherwise seen as a vulnerable incumbent heading into the next campaign, weighed down by soaring inflation, sinking popularity and questions about his capacity to manage the United States into his 80s.

The top draw was Trump, who again teased his future plans.

"I ran twice. I won twice and did much better the second time ... and now we may just have to do it again," he said to cheers and chants of "Take it back!"

DeSantis headlined Friday night's program in an appearance that strongly suggested his ambitions extend beyond Florida.

"We've accomplished an awful lot in the state of Florida. But we have only begun to fight," he said. "Because we are on a mission to keep the state of Florida free and to save our great country."

Yellen downplays recession risk as key reports loom

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Sunday said the U.S. economy is slowing but pointed to healthy hiring as proof that it is not yet in recession.

Yellen spoke on NBC just before a slew of economic reports will be released that will shed light on an economy currently besieged by rampant inflation and threatened by higher interest rates. The data will cover sales of new homes, consumer confidence, incomes, spending, inflation and overall output.

The highest-profile report will likely be Thursday, when the Commerce Department will release its first estimate of the economy's output in the April-June quarter. Some economists forecast it may show a contraction for the second quarter in a row. The economy shrank 1.6% in the January-March quarter. Two straight negative readings is considered

an informal definition of a recession, though in this case economists think that's misleading.

Instead, the National Bureau of Economic Research—a nonprofit group of economists—defines a recession as "a significant decline in economic activity that is spread across the economy and lasts more than a few months."

Yellen argued that much of the economy remains healthy: Consumer spending is growing, Americans' finances, on average, are solid, and the economy has added more than 400,000 jobs a month this year, a robust figure. The unemployment rate is 3.6%, near a half-century low.

"We've got a very strong labor market," Yellen said. "This is not an economy that's in recession."

Still, Yellen acknowledged the economy is "in a period of transition in which growth is slowing," from a historically rapid pace in 2021.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Sailfish leaps out of water, injures woman

FL STUART — A 70-year-old woman was stabbed by the bill of a 100-pound sailfish that leapt out of the water and attacked her as her companions were trying to reel it in on a boat near the Florida coast, authorities said.

The sailfish stabbed the woman from Arnold, Md, in the groin area with its pointed bill Tuesday while she was standing in the boat. Two companions tried to bring it in on a fishing line about two miles offshore from Stuart, Fla., according to a report from the Martin County Sheriff's Office.

The companions applied pressure to the wound, and the woman was taken to Stuart for medical treatment.

Sailfish are among the fastest fish species in the ocean.

Stock trader out of jail after tunnel fire sentence

MD BETHESDA — A wealthy stock trader has been released from prison early after he was convicted of involuntary manslaughter in the death of a man he'd hired to dig tunnels under his home.

News outlets reported that Daniel Beckwitt was released from prison Friday.

The Bethesda resident was initially convicted of murder in the September 2017 death of 21-year-old Askia Khafra. But an appeals court tossed out the murder conviction and he was resentenced in March to five years in prison for involuntary manslaughter.

His release was not unexpected; he had already been incarcerated for about three years and

was already eligible for parole when the judge imposed his 5-year sentence in March.

Beckwitt, who had a paranoid fear about a North Korean nuclear attack, hired Khafra to dig tunnels that would connect his home to a bunker. Firefighters found Khafra's body in the basement of Beckwitt's home. Prosecutors said the extreme hoarding conditions in the home prevented him from escaping.

Driver injures 4 after crashing into crowd

GA SAVANNAH — An elderly person accidentally drove through a popular tourist and shopping district in downtown Savannah on Saturday evening, injuring four people, police said.

Savannah police tweeted that two adults were seriously injured and two juveniles suffered minor injuries after the driver drove through Ellis Square. The square is surrounded by restaurants and shops and features a large water fountain that is a popular attraction for kids to splash around in.

Police did not immediately say whether the driver would be charged.

Authorities: Man killed while robbing dispensary

OK THACKERVILLE — A man was fatally shot while trying to rob a marijuana dispensary at gunpoint, according to the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation.

Two men who have not been identified entered Border Buds in Thackerville near the Oklahoma-Texas state line about 125 miles south of Oklahoma City on Thursday night and demanded money

and marijuana, the OSBI said.

One of the men then showed his gun to the clerk, who said he was also armed, according to the OSBI. The robber then shot at the clerk, who returned fire and killed the man.

The second man fled and has not been found, authorities said.

3 shot outside Chicago church during funeral

IL CHICAGO — A drive-by shooter wounded three men who were taking a picture outside of a Chicago church as they gathered for a funeral service Saturday afternoon, police said.

All three victims were transported to local hospitals in good condition, according to Chicago police.

At approximately 2:30 p.m., someone inside a gray sedan drove by and opened fire at funeral attendees who were taking a picture outside of Universal Community Missionary Baptist Church on Chicago's South Side, The Sun-Times reported. A 20-year-old man was shot in the abdomen, a 37-year-old man was shot in the thigh and a 25-year-old man was shot in the back.

Man charged with firing shots at federal building

TN KNOXVILLE — A man accused of firing shots at a federal courthouse in Tennessee has been charged with destruction of government property.

Mark Thomas Reno is accused of firing at the federal building in Knoxville on July 3 and damaging three windows, according to court documents. Reno was remanded to custody during a de-

tention hearing Thursday on the single charge.

An FBI affidavit said Reno was under surveillance as part of an undercover investigation and a tracking device showed his vehicle at the federal building at the time shots were fired. Security cameras on the federal building also captured video of the vehicle, the affidavit said.

An undercover FBI agent who met with Reno before the building was damaged said the defendant attended the U.S. Capitol riot on Jan. 6, 2021, but there's no evidence he broke any laws. The affidavit also said Reno belongs to a group with a mission to resist actions that oppose Catholic orthodoxy and that he made a number of statements about identifying targets and destroying property, including government buildings.

5 killed in head-on collision on highway

TX TYLER — A car driving on the wrong side of a two-lane highway in East Texas early Friday collided with an SUV, killing all five people in the vehicles, authorities said.

The collision happened at about 5 a.m. on Texas 110, about 6½ miles northwest of Tyler and 85 miles east of Dallas, the Texas Department of Public Safety said.

A Dodge Charger was on the wrong side of the unlit highway and erupted into flames after rounding a curve and slamming head-on into a Chevrolet Tahoe, DPS Sgt. Jason Bundy said.

No evidence of alcohol or drug use was found at the crash scene, but excessive speed by the car may have been a factor, Bundy said. No identities have been released.

— From wire reports

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Track looks to pump up fan base ahead of '28

Associated Press

EUGENE, Ore. — When international track and field officials wanted to place their world championships in the U.S. for the first time, the running mecca that embedded Nike into American culture was the easy choice.

But pictures of half-empty stands in a sparkling new 25,000-seat track stadium in Eugene, Ore., and readouts of TV ratings that didn't beat a routine NASCAR race reemphasized a decades-old reality: When it comes to spectating, not competing, track is a niche sport in the United States.

Track and field's leaders would like that to change over the next six years, especially in view of sagging viewership totals and flat revenue across the broader Olympic world. It's critical, they say, to bring the cornerstone sport of the Summer Games back to its former glory in the U.S. before Los Angeles hosts in 2028.

"For the games to really work, the U.S. needs a really powerful track and field presence," World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said. "You have the best athletes in the world. You have all those other assets. And we have to make sure that people understand a whole heap more about our sport by the time we get to 2028."

The U.S. won 33 medals in Eugene, break-

ing its world-championships record of 30. And yet, track is, at best, the eighth most popular sport in the U.S., according to research commissioned by World Athletics. Coe said he'd like to get it into the top four — more in the realm of the NBA and baseball.

These discussions are similar to the hand-wringing that plays out in U.S. soccer circles during World Cups. If the U.S. teams are successful and millions of people play recreationally, what would it take for this to become more than a niche sport for fans?

"You've got to go to where the young people are. And the base of your sport, you've got to go where those people are, too," said Sheryl Shade, a longtime agent in the Olympic space, while noting the relatively light social media presence of track athletes and a dearth of human-interest stories connected to this year's worlds.

There is a potential audience out there. A Sports & Fitness Industry Association study estimated 50 million Americans (about one-seventh of the U.S. population) are runners.

The National Federation of State High School Associations says there are nearly 1.1 million students participating in track — more than the 1 million playing football — and nearly 500,000 in cross country. And that doesn't account for the sizable number who

run, but aren't on teams.

"You have to look at the assets you have and figure out how to pour gas on them," said marketing expert Joe Favorito. "You have to make sure you're showcasing personalities, and make sure everyone's doing it. More than the TV ratings, my question would be, what's the TikTok strategy, and how are people measuring that?"

There is no Usain Bolt-like personality on the horizon for the U.S., save the tantalizing possibility of the gregarious 200-meter champion Noah Lyles.

"They're quite boring," track legend Edwin Moses said of the current crop of athletes.

The newly crowned 100-meter champion Fred Kerley is a seemingly likeable character with a remarkable backstory — raised with 12 other kids by his aunt, who stepped in after Kerley's parents encountered troubles. But he has done little traditional media and his social media posts leading into worlds were mainly a string of one-liners: "Let's get it," and "Yessir."

In an Instagram video posted shortly after his victory, Kerley declared himself "the greatest of all time" to his 134,000 followers. Bolt, retired for five years, has 11.5 million followers.

McLaughlin's fast lap caps US record medal haul

Associated Press

EUGENE, Ore. — It only made sense that Sydney McLaughlin would run the last, victorious lap of world championships for the United States.

It only made sense she would win that race by a lot.

America's burgeoning speed star turned a close 4x400-meter relay into a laughter on the anchor leg Sunday, putting the final stamp on the first worlds held in the U.S. and delivering America's record 33rd medal of the meet.

It was the 13th gold for the U.S., one short of the all-time mark.

"We're deep," McLaughlin said. "We have a lot of really amazing athletes and we all put our 100% best out there every time we perform."

After taking the baton from Britton Wilson, McLaughlin turned a .73-second lead into a

2.95-second blowout over Jamaica, adding this burst of speed to the world record she set two nights earlier in the 400 hurdles, when she finished in 50.68.

This one was especially sweet, as it also marked the 14th and final world gold for 36-year-old Allyson Felix, who came out of retirement to run in the preliminary of the 4x400 and, so, gets a medal. She finishes her career with a record 20 world medals, overall.

"She came back yesterday and I was like, I mean, if we're gonna go do it, we might as well do it big," McLaughlin said. "And I'm really happy for her amazing career."

The U.S. team, also featuring Talitha Diggs and Abby Steiner, who was part of the winning 4x100 relay team the night before, won the women's race in 3

minutes, 17.79 seconds.

The 33 medals were three more than the U.S. collected in 2017, and two more than East Germany won in 1987.

Other records fell, too — in the very first and very last action of the last session at hot-and-sunny Hayward Stadium, the 25,000-seat gem built at University of Oregon to bring the worlds to Eugene.

Nigeria's Tobi Amusan opened the evening by setting the record for the 100-meter hurdles in the semifinals: 12.12 seconds. She came back about 90 minutes later to win the gold medal.

And after McLaughlin was done with her last lap, pole vaulter Armand Duplantis of Sweden cleared 6.21 meters (20 feet, 4½ inches) to best his world record by .01.

As was the case through most

of these 10 days, America's medals came from every corner of the track — and the field.

Athing Mu said she struggled in capturing gold in the 800, busting through the two laps in 1:56.30 — a .08 margin over Britain's Keely Hodgkinson.

The 20-year-old Mu is now the Olympic and world champion at that distance and, along with McLaughlin, part of a bright future for the United States with the Paris Olympics now two years away.

In between, a sprinter named Champion — Champion Allison — anchored the men's 4x400 to an easy win for medal No. 32. The U.S. won in 2:56.17 for a 2.41-second margin over Jamaica.

Another medal went to U.S. pole vaulter Christopher Nilsen, who cleared 5.94 meters (19 feet, 5¾ inches), to clinch silver.

Alonso's HR sets stage for Mets-Yanks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Pete Alonso lifted the ball into the left-field seats and sent the New York Mets soaring into their high-profile Subway Series matchup against the Yankees and Aaron Judge.

Alonso hit a go-ahead, three-run homer off Joe Musgrove and had four RBIs to retake the major league lead, leading the Mets over the San Diego Padres 8-5 on Sunday night and avoiding a three-game sweep.

Next up: a two-game series against the Yankees at Citi Field starting Tuesday night. Both teams lead their divisions, and Alonso's 82 RBIs are one more than Judge's total.

"I wouldn't really call it toe to toe, me versus him," Alonso said. "This is a moment where the city can come together over the game of baseball."

San Diego had won the first two games of the weekend series behind Yu Darvish and Blake Snell. The Padres took a 1-0 lead in the sixth behind Joe Musgrove and had not trailed in 25 innings.

New York's NL East lead was down to a half-game over defending World Series champion Atlanta.

"We just ran into two buzz saws," Alonso said. "We needed this one. This one was huge for us today."

Alonso hit his 25th home run in a five-run sixth and added an RBI double high off the center-field wall in a three-run seventh that built an 8-1 lead.

Yankees 6, Orioles 0: Aaron Judge hit his major league-leading 37th home run, fel-

low All-Star Nestor Cortes pitched six sharp innings and visiting New York beat Baltimore.

Jose Trevino, another Yankees All-Star, produced the first four-hit game of his career. New York, with the best record in the big leagues, took two of three and has now won 22 of its 32 completed series this year.

Astros 8, Mariners 5: Jose Altuve and Jeremy Peña hit back-to-back home runs off Robbie Ray to begin the game, and visiting Houston roughed up the reigning AL Cy Young Award to complete a three-game sweep of Seattle.

Martín Maldonado had three RBIs from the No. 9 spot in the lineup and All-Star lefty Framber Valdez (9-4) took a shutout into the seventh inning for the Astros, who won their fifth straight and increased their AL West lead to 13 games over second-place Seattle.

Dodgers 7, Giants 4: Trayce Thompson drove in two runs with an RBI double during the decisive rally in the seventh inning while host Los Angeles surged past San Francisco for its season-high eighth consecutive victory.

Blue Jays 8, Red Sox 4: Raimel Tapia had three hits and drove in four runs, giving him 10 RBIs for the series, and Vladimir Guerrero had four hits as visiting Toronto beat bumbling Boston for a three-game sweep.

Angels 9, Braves 1: Taylor Ward homered in a five-run first, Reid Detmers pitched five scoreless innings and visiting Los Angeles cooled off Atlanta.

Reds 6, Cardinals 3: Joey Votto hit a

three-run homer to back Tyler Mahle's sharp return from injury as host Cincinnati beat St. Louis.

Twins 9, Tigers 1: Sonny Gray allowed two hits in six innings to lead visiting Minnesota over Detroit.

Cubs 4, Phillies 3: Yan Gomes hit two home runs, Drew Smyly tossed six sharp innings and visiting Chicago completed a three-game sweep of Philadelphia.

Marlins 6, Pirates 5 (10): Nick Fortes and Miguel Rojas hit RBI singles in the 10th inning and visiting Miami topped Pittsburgh.

White Sox 6, Guardians 3: Dylan Cease threw six innings in his third straight scoreless start, Eloy Jiménez, Leury Garcia and AJ Pollock homered, and host Chicago beat Cleveland to salvage a four-game split.

Royals 4, Rays 2: Kris Bubic went seven strong innings, Hunter Dozier and MJ Melendez had late-inning RBIs and host Kansas City won a series against Tampa Bay for the first time in five years.

Rangers 11, Athletics 8: Martín Pérez allowed four hits in seven strong innings to extend his undefeated streak and beat fellow All-Star Paul Blackburn, leading visiting Texas over Oakland.

Brewers 10, Rockies 9: Andrew McCutchen's tiebreaking, two-run double capped a two-out rally in the eighth inning that lifted host Milwaukee over Colorado.

Nationals 4, Diamondbacks 3: Keibert Ruiz had three hits, including a go-ahead single in the eighth inning, and visiting Washington avoided a three-game sweep by beating Arizona.

Big Papi a big hit at Baseball Hall of Fame induction

Associated Press

COOPERSTOWN, N.Y. — David Ortiz promised to speak from the heart. As usual, Big Papi delivered.

His megawatt smile tinged with a tad of emotion, the former Boston Red Sox slugger was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame on Sunday — after his daughter Alexandra sang the national anthem — and was humbled by his surroundings.

"I want to thank God for giving me the opportunity to be here today and for giving me the joy of being able to travel this path, this path that has al-

lowed me to be here today and hopefully inspire everyone to believe in yourself," Ortiz said.

Ortiz was greeted by a raucous crowd chanting "Papi! Papi!" as many fans made the four-hour drive from the vicinity of Fenway Park to attend the festivities.

When he took the stage, Ortiz pointed skyward as is his wont in special moments, a way of honoring his late mother, who died two decades ago after a car accident.

"I always tried to live my life in a way ... so I can make a positive influence in the world,"

said the 46-year-old Ortiz, just the 58th player elected in his first year on the ballot. "And if my story can remind you of anything, let it remind you that when you believe in someone, you can change the world, you can change their future, just like so many people believed in me."

Ortiz, who survived a nightclub shooting in the Dominican Republic three years ago, soaked in the celebration.

Legions of fans crowded onto the field adjacent to Clark Sports Center, sun umbrellas and Dominican Republic flags

sprinkled all around. Ortiz's No. 34 was seemingly everywhere as fans chanted and sang in Spanish. A sign that read 'I Love U' summed up the admiration for Big Papi on his special day.

Six Era Committee selections also comprised in the Class of 2022 — former Twins teammates Jim Kaat and Tony Oliva, the late Minnie Miñoso, former Dodgers star and Mets manager Gil Hodges, and Black pioneers Buck O'Neil and Bud Fowler.

In 14 years with the Red Sox, Ortiz hit 541 homers — 17 of them in the postseason.

Elliott wins Pocono after Hamlin, Busch DQ'd

Associated Press

LONG POND, Pa. — The siren at the Dawsonville, Ga., pool hall that sounds whenever Chase Elliott wins a race did indeed go off Sunday night without the hometown star ever leading a lap at Pocono Raceway.

“Winner, winner Joe Gibbs Racing are cheaters!” the Dawsonville Pool Room tweeted.

In an extraordinary decision for a NASCAR Cup Series race, Joe Gibbs Racing driver Denny Hamlin had his Pocono win thrown out and runner-up and teammate Kyle Busch also was disqualified after their Toyotas failed inspections.

Elliott shot up from third place and the Hendrick Motorsports driver was awarded his fourth victory of the season. He never led a lap in the No. 9 Chevrolet — and his car also was inspected by NASCAR.

Hamlin lost his record seventh victory at Pocono and his third win of the season. Busch led a race-high 63 laps.

NASCAR believed the last time it disqualified an apparent winner was April 17, 1960, when Emanuel Zervakis' victory at Wilson Speedway in North Carolina was thrown out because of an oversized fuel tank.

“We were shocked to learn of the infraction that caused our two cars to fail NASCAR's post-race technical inspection,” Joe Gibbs said in a statement. “We plan to review every part of the process that led to this

situation.”

The penalties can be appealed and both Toyotas were sent to NASCAR's research and development center in North Carolina for further evaluation. NASCAR said the infractions were not caught in the pre-race inspection because the wrap was not removed from the cars until after the race.

“There was some issues discovered that affect aero in the vehicle,” NASCAR Cup Series managing director Brad Moran said. “There really was no reason why there was some material that was somewhere it shouldn't have been. And that does basically come down to a DQ.”

Moran said the parts in question were the front fascia — essentially the nose cone — and final decisions “should be sorted out by next week.”

Moran said the inspection “rules have tightened up” with the introduction this season of a new car. NASCAR's newest version is pretty much a kit car. Teams get all the same pieces from varying vendors and have detailed instructions regarding how to put it together.

“We don't want to be here talking about this problem,” Moran said. “But the teams and the owners and everybody was well aware that this new car was going to be kept with some pretty tight tolerances. There's some areas that all the teams are well aware that we can not go down the path that we had

in the past with the other car.”

The failures marred what had been a banner day for JGR.

Hamlin had seemingly won for the third time this season and passed Hall of Fame driver Jeff Gordon for most wins at Pocono with seven. Hamlin swept two races at Pocono in his rookie season in 2006, and added wins in 2009, 2010, 2019 and 2020. Now, he remains tied with the four-time NASCAR champion.

Hamlin had plenty to handle from the start, when the pole sitter tagged the wall on the opening lap. He recovered — at 400 miles on the 2½-mile tri-oval there's plenty of racing ahead — then had to watch Busch lead the majority of the race. Oh, then there was this thorny issue of settling a lingering score with Ross Chastain.

Chastain wrecked Hamlin two times in a month earlier this season — Hamlin counted two more times from last season — and was fed-up with the aggressive driving of the watermelon farmer. Hamlin refused to give his rival an inch off a restart at Pocono and forced Chastain into the wall with 16 laps left in the race. Chastain slammed the wall and triggered a wreck that collected several drivers, including winless Kevin Harvick, who is fighting for a playoff spot.

“What did you want me to do? What did you expect me to do,” Hamlin asked in the immediate aftermath.

Newgarden hospitalized, O'Ward wins Iowa IndyCar

Associated Press

NEWTON, Iowa — Josef Newgarden collapsed in the motorhome lot following his late crash Sunday at Iowa Speedway and was taken to a Des Moines hospital by helicopter for evaluation. Team Penske said he'd be held overnight.

“Following the conclusion of the race Newgarden lost consciousness and fell, sustaining a cut on the back of his head,” Team Penske said in a statement. “After being evaluated, all scans were negative. Newgarden will be held overnight for observation. Following IndyCar protocol, Newgarden will be evaluated by the IndyCar medical staff on Thursday.”

IndyCar medical director Dr.

Geoffrey Billows said Newgarden was transported by helicopter to Mercy One Des Moines Medical Center because the infield care center lacked the equipment to properly evaluate the American.

Billows said Newgarden was awake and alert, but the hospital was a 45-minute drive from the track and heavy traffic for the post-race Blake Shelton concert would have delayed the journey.

Newgarden dominated and led 148 of the 300 laps while trying to sweep the doubleheader weekend. But something on his Team Penske car broke with 64 laps remaining and the 31-year-old from Tennessee spun hard into the outside wall — creating an opening for Pato O'Ward of Arrow McLaren

SP to win.

Newgarden, a two-time IndyCar champion, was visibly rattled after his mandatory check in the infield care center after the crash. He said the crash into the wall “definitely rocked me. I got a little bit shaken from it but I'm OK.”

“Definitely was a bit of a shot. I want to cry, so sad for my team. I don't know what happened,” Newgarden said. “Everything felt fine to me. Totally unexpected and it caught me by my surprise. Team Penske is the best. I never have this stuff, so maybe we were due.”

Chevrolet's initial diagnosis was that the suspension broke on Newgarden's car. There was no immediate word on the force in

which Newgarden hit the outside wall.

Billows said Newgarden cleared all tests in the care center after the crash, and the medical staff spoke to him a second time before he returned to the motorhome lot. IndyCar also had planned to reevaluate him Thursday in Indianapolis before he collapsed upon returning to the motorhome lot.

“Thinking of my bus brother right now,” tweeted Penske teammate Scott McLaughlin.

O'Ward made the pass for the win on pit road with a speedy stop by his Arrow McLaren SP team and held off Penske teammates Will Power and Scott McLaughlin. It's the second win of the season for the Mexican driver.