

Military plans for possible Pelosi Taiwan visit

Associated Press

SYDNEY — U.S. officials say they have little fear China would attack Nancy Pelosi's plane if she flies to Taiwan. But the U.S. House speaker would be entering one of the world's hottest spots, where a mishap, misstep or misunderstanding could endanger her safety. So the Pentagon is developing plans for any contingency.

Officials told The Associated Press that if Pelosi goes to Taiwan — still an uncertainty — the military would increase its movement of forces and assets in the Indo-Pacific region. They declined to provide details, but said that fighter jets, ships, surveillance assets and other military systems would likely be used to provide overlapping rings of protection for her flight to Taiwan and any time on the ground there.

Any foreign travel by a senior U.S. leader requires additional security. But officials said this week that a visit to Taiwan by Pelosi — she would be the highest-ranking U.S. elected official to visit Taiwan since 1997 — would go beyond the usual safety precautions for trips to less

risky destinations.

Asked about planned military steps to protect Pelosi, D-Calif., in the event of a visit, U.S. Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Wednesday that discussion of any specific travel is premature. But, he added, "if there's a decision made that Speaker Pelosi or anyone else is going to travel and they asked for military support, we will do what is necessary to ensure a safe conduct of their visit. And I'll just leave it at that."

Pelosi would be the highest-ranking American lawmaker to visit the close U.S. ally since a predecessor as speaker, Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., traveled there 25 years ago.

China considers self-ruling Taiwan its own territory and has raised the prospect of annexing it by force. The United States maintains informal relations and defense ties with Taiwan even as it recognizes Beijing as the government of China.

The U.S. officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive security issues, described the need to create buffer zones around the

speaker and her plane. The U.S. already has substantial forces spread across the region, so any increased security could largely be handled by assets already in place.

The military would also have to be prepared for any incident — even an accident either in the air or on the ground. They said the U.S. would need to have rescue capabilities nearby and suggested that could include helicopters on ships already in the area.

Pelosi has not publicly confirmed any new plans for a trip to Taiwan. She was going to go in April, but she postponed the trip after testing positive for COVID-19.

The White House on Monday declined to weigh in directly on the matter, noting she had not confirmed the trip. But President Joe Biden last week raised concerns about it, telling reporters that the military thinks her trip is "not a good idea right now."

A Pelosi trip may well loom over a call planned for Thursday between Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping, their first conversation in four months. A

U.S. official confirmed plans for the call to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity ahead of the formal announcement.

U.S. officials have said the administration doubts China would take direct action against Pelosi herself or try to sabotage the visit. But they haven't ruled out the possibility that China could escalate provocative overflights of military aircraft in or near Taiwanese airspace and naval patrols in the Taiwan Strait should the trip take place. They also don't preclude Chinese actions elsewhere in the region as a show of strength.

The biggest risk during Pelosi's trip is of some Chinese show of force "gone awry, or some type of accident that comes out of a demonstration of provocative action," said Mark Cozad, acting associate director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at the Rand Corp. "So it could be an air collision. It could be some sort of missile test, and, again, when you're doing those types of things, you know, there is always the possibility that something could go wrong."

HIMARS enables Ukraine to hit key bridge

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian troops used American-supplied precision rocket launchers to knock out a vital bridge used by Russia to supply its forces in an occupied region of southern Ukraine, officials said Wednesday.

The Antonivskiy Bridge over the Dnieper River was attacked late Tuesday, according to Kirill Stremousov, deputy head of the Moscow-appointed administration for the Kherson region. The bridge was left standing, but holes in its deck prevented vehicles from crossing the nearly one-mile span, he said.

The bridge was closed to trucks after previous Ukrainian attacks damaged it last week, but it had remained open for passenger vehicles until the latest strike.

Russian forces have intensified their shelling of cities and villages in eastern Ukraine in recent days while also stepping up airstrikes in the south. At the same time, the Kremlin's troops are facing mounting counterattacks from the Ukrainians in the Kherson region, which was captured by Moscow early in the war.

Ukrainian forces used U.S.-supplied HI-

MARS multiple rocket launchers to target the bridge, Stremousov said. A Ukrainian military spokesperson, Nataliya Gumenyuk, told Ukrainian TV that "surgical strikes" were carried out on the bridge.

The HIMARS has greater range, much more precision and a faster rate of fire than the Soviet-designed Smerch, Uragan and Tornado rocket launchers used by both Russia and Ukraine. The weapons were among the billions of dollars in Western military aid that has helped Ukraine fight off the Russians since the Feb. 24 invasion.

Navy sets priorities in force-design plan

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Navy leaders are strengthening their commitment to developing more advanced weapons and other capabilities over some traditional ships to challenge the increasing aggression from China and Russia around the globe, according to the service's 2022 Navigation Plan released Tuesday.

"Retiring legacy platforms that cannot stay relevant in contested seas — and investing in the capabilities we need for the future — is essential for our national security," the Navy wrote in the document that lays out the service's long-term priorities.

Citing China's ongoing efforts to build its military rapidly and Russia's dismantling of the post-Cold War peace in Europe when it invaded Ukraine in February, the service said prioritizing new capabilities and weapons will be key to future conflicts, according to the document.

"The world is entering a new age of warfare, one in which the integration of technology, concepts, partners and systems — more than fleet size alone — will determine victory in conflict," the service said in the document.

The navigation plan helps lay out the service's requirements for Congress, which has been hesitant to allow the Navy to cut ships as China grows its fleet, Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, told reporters Wednesday.

"There's more work to be done with the Hill, particularly with respect to composition of the force — explaining ourselves better with respect to that composition, the why

behind it," Gilday said about explaining the Navy's plan for the force to lawmakers.

In its 2023 proposed budget, the Navy said it wants to cut 24 ships next year to save \$3.6 billion in the next five years that could be used to develop new technologies. They included nine Freedom-class littoral combat ships, five Ticonderoga-class cruisers, two Los Angeles-class submarines, four landing dock ships, two oilers and two expeditionary transfer dock vessels.

Whether Congress will allow the Navy to cut 24 ships remains in question. Last year, lawmakers ordered the Navy to build 13 ships in the fiscal 2022 budget in pursuit of a larger fleet after service leaders asked for just eight.

Some lawmakers, such as Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Va., spoke out against the ship cuts since the budget was made public March 28, noting the strategy "prioritizes future technologies over the capacity and capabilities service members need now."

"I am particularly disappointed that even as we aim to grow our naval and projection forces, this budget continues the divest-to-invest strategy that will shrink our fleet once again," the congressman said at the time.

The service wants to "shift to a larger, more capable Navy" that incorporates "a host of manned, unmanned and operationally manned platforms," according to the document.

The Navy is required by Congress to reach a fleet of 355 ships "as soon as possible" under the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, which sets the military's goals and spending priorities. Its new plan calls for a

"hybrid fleet" of more than 350 warships, about 150 unmanned ships and underwater vehicles, and approximately 3,000 aircraft by the 2040s, according to the document.

"The why behind the composition and the size is grounded on how we're going to fight," Gilday said. "In short, it is our intent to face any adversary with our forces spread out with our effects masked across multiple vectors, both physically and virtually in all domains from the seabed to space."

The changes are necessary so the Navy can keep up with "a battlespace that is quickly growing in lethality and complexity," according to the document.

For example, China has tripled the size of its Navy since the early 1990s, expanded its nuclear weapons capabilities, advanced its cyber and space capabilities, and developed long-range weapons and hypersonic missiles, the Navy said.

"These investments in offensive war-fighting systems — across all domains — are aimed at the heart of America's maritime power," according to the document. "China designs its force for one purpose: to reshape the security environment to its advantage by denying the United States military access to the western Pacific and beyond."

Additionally, Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine also presents a challenge to the U.S. Russia seeks to "fracture NATO and reestablish its sphere of influence" and threaten global peace with nuclear threats, cyberattacks and submarine deployments near American shores, according to the document.

Sub contractor eyes next-generation nuclear reactor

Bloomberg

A defense contractor that supplied components for the earliest nuclear submarines will be tapping its military expertise to enter the race to build the next generation of nuclear reactors.

BWX Technologies Inc. expects to complete a working prototype of a small, advanced reactor under a \$300-million contract with the U.S. Department of Defense. Providing power plants to the military will facilitate the company's efforts to build a commercial version that could be ready by

the end of the decade, according to Joe Miller, president of BWX's advanced technology unit.

BWX is part of a wave of companies developing small nuclear plants that are expected to be faster and cheaper to build than the conventional reactors widely used today. While there's a growing sense that these advanced reactors could offer a key tool in the fight against climate change, the technology remains unproven and there are daunting hurdles in bringing it to market.

Still, the Lynchburg, Va.-based company

said having a working system will help when it eventually seeks government approval for a commercial design. Its efforts are building on a long legacy of nuclear projects that originated within the military before shifting to civilian use.

The BWX reactor will have 1 to 5 megawatts of capacity, far smaller than commercial reactors operated by utilities that are typically about 1,000 megawatts. It will be small enough to deliver in four standard shipping containers and can be assembled on-site.

Trump, Pence speeches show stark GOP divide

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—The intensifying rivalry between former President Donald Trump and his once fiercely loyal vice president, Mike Pence, was put on stark display Tuesday as the two gave dueling speeches in Washington on the future of the Republican Party.

Trump, in his first return to Washington since Democrat Joe Biden ousted him from the White House, repeated the false election fraud claims that sparked the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol insurrection, while Pence, in a separate address, implored the party to move on from Trump's defeat.

Federal and state election officials and Trump's own attorney general have said there is no credible evidence the 2020 election was tainted. The former president's allegations of fraud were also roundly rejected by courts, including by judges he appointed.

"It was a catastrophe, that election," Trump nonetheless declared to an audience of cheering supporters at the America First Agenda Summit, about a mile from the White House he once called home.

Hours earlier, addressing a student conser-

vative group, Pence said, "Some people may choose to focus on the past, but elections are about the future."

The speeches highlighted the divisions within the party between Trump loyalists who still refuse to accept the results of the 2020 election and other Republicans who believe the party should focus on the future heading into this fall's midterm elections and beyond.

And they come as both men have been laying the groundwork for expected presidential runs. Trump, in particular, has been teasing his intentions and said Tuesday that he "may just have to do it again" as he addressed a group of former White House officials and Cabinet members who have been crafting an agenda for a possible second Trump administration.

Pence spoke about his own "Freedom Agenda" as he presented a different vision for the party at a conference nearby.

"I believe conservatives must focus on the future to win back America. We can't afford to take our eyes off the road in front of us because what's at stake is the very survival of

our way of life," he said in an address to Young America's Foundation, a student conservative group.

Trump, too, said America's survival was at stake. In a speech billed as focused on public safety, he painted a dark picture of a nation in decline and one in imminent danger from rising crime. Among his proposals, he called for executing drug dealers, sending the homeless to tent cities on the outskirts of cities and expanding his Southern border wall.

Biden joined in — on Twitter — dismissing Trump's claim to have been a law-and-order president. Referring to the Capitol riot, he tweeted: "I don't think inciting a mob that attacks a police officer is 'respect for the law.' You can't be pro-insurrection and pro-cop — or pro-democracy, or pro-American."

Trump, in his remarks, also spent plenty of time airing his usual grievances even as some advisers have urged him to move on.

"If I renounced my beliefs, if I agreed to stay silent, if I stayed home and just took it easy, the persecution of Donald Trump would stop immediately," he said. "But that's not what I will do."

Abortion clinic prepares for likely final day operating in North Dakota

Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. — North Dakota's only abortion clinic is preparing for what could be its final day of performing procedures, with a trigger ban due to take effect Thursday that will likely force patients to travel hundreds of miles to receive care pending the clinic's relocation across the border to Minnesota.

Barring a judge's intervention, the Red River Women's Clinic will provide abortion services Wednesday then shut down. Owner Tammi Kromenaker is building a new clinic in Moorhead, Minn., with the aid of nearly \$1 million raised through GoFundMe. Kromenaker has not said when the new clinic will open and she did not respond to messages Tuesday. Planned Parenthood has said it can perform abortions at its own Moorhead facility to fill the gap if needed, but it is not clear if that will happen.

Once North Dakota's ban takes effect, the nearest abortion clinics will be in Minneapolis and Duluth, Minn., a drive of about four hours from Fargo, and in Billings, Mont., nearly four hours from North Dakota's western border.

Destini Spaeth, the volunteer leader of an independent group that helps fund abortions

in North Dakota, is investigating temporary solutions until the Moorhead clinic opens. That could include helping to pay for trips to Minnesota and Montana.

"To have to cross state lines and to be treated like and spoken about like a criminal in your home state and forced to travel elsewhere, pleading for care, desperate for care," said Spaeth, spokeswoman for the North Dakota Women In Need fund. "It's got to be just so traumatic."

The clinic is suing in state court to block the trigger law, which was passed years ago to take effect if the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the Roe v. Wade precedent establishing a right to abortion. The lawsuit argues that a ban would be contrary to the state constitution.

McKenzie McCoy, executive director of North Dakota Right To Life, said she's "overjoyed the clinic is closing" but isn't blind to the fact that the clinic is reopening a few miles away.

"So we will continue to go across to Minnesota to love these women and show that, you know, we're here for you, regardless of the decision, but that there really are other solutions," she said.

Prison sentence matches longest for Capitol riot

Associated Press

A man who attacked police officers with poles during the riot at the U.S. Capitol was sentenced on Tuesday to more than five years in prison, matching the longest term of imprisonment so far among hundreds of Capitol riot prosecutions.

Mark Ponder, 56, a resident of Washington, D.C., said he "got caught up" in the chaos that erupted on Jan. 6, 2021, and "didn't mean for any of this to happen."

"I wasn't thinking that day," Ponder told U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan, before she sentenced him to five years and three months in prison. That was three months longer than the prison sentence requested by prosecutors. It's also the same sentence Chutkan gave Robert Palmer, a Florida man who also pleaded guilty to assaulting police at the Capitol.

Chutkan said Ponder was "leading the charge" against police officers trying to hold off the mob that disrupted Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's electoral victory.

"This is not 'caught up,' Mr. Ponder," she said.

Heat records fall as Northwest swelters

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Free transportation to cooling centers and garbage pickup well before sunrise were among the steps being taken in the Pacific Northwest as the region hit the peak of a multiday heat wave.

Temperatures soared to 102 degrees Fahrenheit in Oregon's largest city on Tuesday, which is expected to be the hottest day of a scorching spell that will be unusually long for this part of the United States. It was also a new daily record for the city for July 26, besting the previous mark set in 2020.

Seattle also reported a new all-time daily high of 94 F, breaking the previous record of 92 F from 2018, according to the National Weather Service.

Elsewhere in Washington state, record daily temperatures were also registered in Belling-

ham and the capital, Olympia, which experienced 90 F and 97 F, respectively.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown declared a state of emergency across much of the state, warning the extreme temperatures may cause utility outages and transportation disruptions. Temperatures aren't expected to cool in western Oregon and Washington until the weekend.

Under the sweltering heat, Matthew Carr spent his lunch break in a fountain in downtown Portland, Ore. The 57-year-old works outside picking up trash for the city and had to find a way to cool off.

"This is pretty hot," Carr said. "I can just take my uniform off, jump in there with my shorts for my break, and hang out for a good 10 or 15 minutes."

Oregon health officials say there has been an uptick in the

number of people reporting heat-related illness in emergency departments, and the number of those calling emergency services numbers for similar symptoms.

"Heat-related illness daily visits are above expected levels statewide," said Jonathan Modie, lead communications officer at the Oregon Health Authority's Public Health Division. He said there were 32 such visits to emergency rooms on Monday compared to three to five per day before the heat wave began.

Portland officials have opened cooling centers in public buildings and installed misting stations in parks.

TriMet, which operates public transportation in the Portland metropolitan area, will allow passengers who cannot afford fares to ride for free when heading to cooling centers.

Most of Portland's garbage companies began earlier pickups on Tuesday morning, starting as early as 4 a.m. to reduce drivers' exposure to heat and health risks. The early rounds will likely continue through Friday morning.

Multnomah County, which includes Portland, planned to open four overnight emergency cooling shelters starting Tuesday night so people who can't get cool on their own could spend the night. The locations can accommodate 245 guests, said Multnomah County spokesperson Kate Yeiser.

"We're going to find space for anybody who needs it," Yeiser said, adding that the sites have a "no-turn-away policy." She said the county may open an additional overnight center on Wednesday if there's high demand.

3rd body in 3 months found in Lake Mead

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Another body has surfaced at Lake Mead — this time in a swimming area where water levels have dropped as the Colorado River reservoir behind Hoover Dam recedes because of drought and climate change.

The National Park Service did not say in a statement how long officials think the corpse was submerged in the Boulder Beach area before it was found Monday by people who summoned park rangers.

Clark County Coroner Melanie Rouse said Tuesday it was partially encased in mud at the water line of the swimming area along the shore north of Hemenway Harbor marina.

The gender of the dead person was not immediately apparent, Rouse said, and it was too early to tell a time,

cause and manner of death. Investigators will review missing persons records as part of the effort, Rouse said.

The corpse was the third found since May as the shoreline retreats at the shrinking reservoir between Nevada and Arizona east of Las Vegas. The lake surface has dropped more than 170 feet since the reservoir was full in 1983. It is now about 30% full.

The coroner said her office was continuing work to identify a man whose body was found May 1 in a rusted barrel in the Hemenway Harbor area and a man whose bones were found May 7 in a newly surfaced sand bar near Callville Bay, more than 9 miles from the marina.

On July 6, the body of a 22-year-old Boulder City woman was found in the water near where she disappeared while riding a personal wa-

tercraft. Rouse said it may take several weeks to determine her cause of death.

The case of the body in the barrel was being investigated as a homicide after police said the man had been shot and his clothing dated to the mid-1970s to early 1980s.

The discoveries have prompted speculation about long-unsolved missing person and murder cases dating back decades — to organized crime and the early days of Las Vegas, which is just a 30-minute drive from the lake.

The drop in the lake level comes while a vast majority of peer-reviewed science says the world is warming, mainly because of rising levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Scientists say the U.S. West, including the Colorado River basin, has become warmer and drier in the past 30 years.

Biden tests negative for COVID-19, ends isolation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is ending his COVID-19 isolation after testing negative for the virus on Tuesday night and again on Wednesday.

That's according to a letter the White House released Wednesday from Biden's physician.

Dr. Kevin O'Connor writes that Biden has completed his course of treatment with the drug Paxlovid and remains free of fever. O'Connor says that given those factors and the pair of negative tests, Biden will discontinue his "strict isolation" measures.

Biden, 79, tested positive for COVID-19 last week.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police investigate pet snake strangling owner

PA FOGELSVILLE — A man's pet boa constrictor wrapped itself around his neck, sending him to a hospital, where he died several days later, authorities in Pennsylvania said.

Elliot Senseman, 27, died at Lehigh Valley Hospital, Cedar Crest, the Lehigh County coroner's office said. The cause of death was listed as anoxic brain injury due to asphyxiation by constriction, and the manner of death was ruled accidental.

Police were called to a home in Fogelsville, in eastern Pennsylvania, on a report of a man in cardiac arrest with a snake wrapped around his neck. An officer was able to shoot the snake's head without hurting the man, who was given medical aid and taken to the hospital.

Police: Preacher robbed of jewelry during sermon

NY NEW YORK — A flashy preacher pal of New York City's mayor was robbed of more than \$1 million worth of jewelry by armed bandits who crashed his Brooklyn church service, just as he was sermonizing about keeping faith in the face of grave adversity, police said.

Bishop Lamar Miller-Whitehead, known for tooling around the Big Apple in a Rolls-Royce and his friendship with Mayor Eric Adams, was delivering a sermon at his Leaders of Tomorrow International Ministries when police said three robbers walked in. They flashed guns and demanded property from Miller-Whitehead and his

wife, Asia K. DosReis-Whitehead, police said.

Miller-Whitehead said in a video posted to Instagram that the robbers ripped off his collar to grab his chain and held a gun to his infant daughter's face while stealing his wife's jewelry.

Police said the robbers fled in a white Mercedes. Neither Miller-Whitehead, 44, nor DosReis-Whitehead, 38, were physically injured, police said. Their daughter was also unharmed.

Man who hid guns in unfinished jail convicted

TN NASHVILLE — A Tennessee jury found a prominent prison reform advocate guilty of vandalism after he disguised himself as a construction worker to hide guns, handcuff keys and hacksaw blades inside the walls of a Nashville jail under construction.

Alex Friedmann was found guilty of vandalism over \$250,000 in a case that a prosecutor likened to something out of a Hollywood movie. Much of it was caught on surveillance video and went undisputed.

Prosecutors said Friedmann had been going into the building for several months when a sheriff's office official first noticed in December 2019 that two keys were missing from a set of keys at the new \$150 million Downtown Detention Center.

Surveillance video showed the person who took the keys entering the jail and doing some type of work on the walls. When he entered Jan. 4, 2020, Friedmann was stopped while police were called. During the wait, Friedmann took jail schematics

out of his pocket, ripped them up and ate them, Deputy District Attorney Amy Hunter said.

Attorney wins annual Hemingway contest

FL KEY WEST — Some came in wool fisherman's sweaters, and other contestants had sportsmen's attire. But it was the cream-colored sweater of attorney Jon Auvil that caught the eye of judges who awarded him the title for most resembling author and former Key West resident Ernest Hemingway.

Auvil triumphed over 124 other contestants for the title in the annual Hemingway Look-Alike Contest at Sloppy Joe's Bar, the Key West establishment where the author was a regular patron during his decadelong residence on the island in the 1930s.

The look-a-like contest is a highlight of Key West's annual Hemingway Days celebration.

Patrol: Man stole ambulance, led chase

NC WINSTON-SALEM — Authorities arrested a man after a county ambulance running with the keys still in it was stolen from a restaurant parking lot and the driver led law enforcement on a chase, the N.C. State Highway Patrol said.

The Catawba County ambulance was parked at a restaurant across the street from Atrium Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center on Friday morning, the Winston-Salem Journal reported.

Winston-Salem police said the ambulance was left running because of the refrigerated drugs inside the vehicle. The

ambulance was accidentally left unsecured before a person got into the vehicle's driver's seat and drove away, police said. A chase ensued until Iredell County deputies used tire-deflating devices to stop the ambulance.

A 37-year-old Winston-Salem man was charged with possession of a stolen vehicle, fleeing to elude arrest and resisting a public officer.

Murder hornets given new common name

WA OLYMPIA — The invasive hornet found in Washington state that has been referred to as the Asian giant hornet or murder hornet has a new name.

Washington state Department of Agriculture officials said the Entomological Society of America has adopted "northern giant hornet" for the species *Vespa mandarinia* in its Common Names of Insects and Related Organisms List.

There has been no official ESA common name since its introduction in North America became widely known in 2020, officials said. Washington state will use the new common name.

The new name is intended to comply with ESA's insect common names guidelines, which include avoiding naming insects using geographic regions.

The insects are the world's largest hornets, with queens reaching up to 2 inches long. They are considered invasive in North America for their ability to kill other bee and hornet species, which is how they got the nickname "murder hornets."

— From wire reports

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NFL training camps open with questions

Associated Press

Training camps opened across the NFL and the biggest offseason question remains unanswered.

The Cleveland Browns still don't know how many games they'll be without Deshaun Watson, who is still waiting for retired judge Sue L. Robinson to issue a ruling following his disciplinary hearing that concluded nearly four weeks ago.

The league and the NFL Players' Association requested a decision by the start of training camp, according to a person familiar with the process who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the discussions are private. Robinson, who was jointly appointed by the league and the union, had no obligation to meet that deadline. Representatives are hopeful a decision comes this week.

Watson was accused of sexual misconduct by 24 women and has settled 20 of the civil lawsuits. Two separate Texas grand juries declined to indict Watson on criminal complaints stemming from the allegations.

The Browns, along with 27 other teams, welcomed their veterans on Tuesday as each of the 32 teams have now kicked off camp. Watson reported to his first camp with Cleveland last week along with veteran backup Jacoby Brissett, the team's presumed starter if there is a suspension. The Browns also signed Josh Rosen last week as more quarterback insurance.

Watson was supposed to be on the field for the team's first full-squad practice Wednesday. There was an amusing mo-

ment on Monday when the three-time Pro Bowl quarterback was seen walking in full uniform across the street in front of the Browns' training facility to take part in a photo shoot.

Other top questions around the NFL that still need to be addressed in training camp:

Where's Jimmy G going?

The San Francisco 49ers made it clear Trey Lance will be the starting quarterback and they're moving on from Jimmy Garoppolo, who led them to a Super Bowl appearance following the 2019 season and nearly another one last season. The Niners have to trade or release Garoppolo before Week 1 to avoid having his \$24.2 million base salary become fully guaranteed. Garoppolo would've been moved already if it weren't for his offseason shoulder surgery.

Baker or Sam?

The Carolina Panthers acquired Baker Mayfield from the Browns earlier this month and plan to let him compete with Sam Darnold for the starting quarterback job. Mayfield, the No. 1 overall pick in 2018, has been more successful than Darnold, who was the third pick by the Jets in the same draft.

Panthers coach Matt Rhule isn't going to rush a decision.

"Anytime you put timelines on things, you end up rushing to make bad decisions," Rhule said. "To me this is about being in the moment but not making rash judgements. Guys are going to have good days and bad days. When we know, we know."

When will Lamar get paid?

The Baltimore Ravens still haven't locked Lamar Jackson into a long-term contract extension but the two sides have been talking. Jackson, the 2019 NFL MVP, saw his value increase after the Cardinals gave Kyler Murray a deal worth up to \$230.5 million with about \$105 million guaranteed at signing and \$160 million guaranteed for injury. Jackson doesn't have an agent, which could impact negotiations. It wasn't a factor for his rookie deal because the collective bargaining agreement pre-determines the money in each draft slot. This contract is far more lucrative.

Are they healthy?

Saints quarterback Jameis Winston, Buccaneers wide receiver Chris Godwin and Ravens running back J.K. Dobbins are among more than 50 players returning from ACL injuries. Panthers running back Christian McCaffrey played only seven games last season because of hamstring and ankle injuries. Titans star running back Derrick Henry missed nine games with a foot injury before playing in the team's playoff loss to the Bengals. Cowboys receiver Michael Gallup, Ravens running back Gus Edwards, Titans receiver Robert Woods and Packers tight end Robert Tonyan are also coming back from ACL surgery. Saints star wideout Michael Thomas missed 2021 because of a severe ankle injury, and Vikings receiver Adam Thielen had ankle surgery in December.

Darnold says he's not bitter over Mayfield trade

Associated Press

SPARTANBURG, S.C. — If Sam Darnold is bitter about the Carolina Panthers' decision to trade for Baker Mayfield, he's doing a great job of hiding his feelings.

Darnold said Tuesday he welcomes the competition at quarterback.

"They're going to do whatever they feel like is best for the team to win ballgames this year," Darnold said. "If that's bringing in Baker and us competing with each other for the starting job, then that's the best thing for the team."

Mayfield was drafted No. 1 overall in 2018 by Cleveland, but his relationship with the Browns deteriorated quickly this offseason after their pursuit of Deshaun Watson.

Mayfield was traded to Carolina on July 6 for a conditional fifth-round 2024 draft pick.

Coach Matt Rhule views the quarterback situation as an open competition as the Panthers prepared for their first training camp practice on Wednesday at Wofford College.

Rhule wasn't ready to discuss how he plans to divide up reps at practice until after he has a chance to meet with his quarterbacks. Nor would he put a timetable on when he hopes to announce a starter.

"Anytime you put timelines on things, you end up rushing to make bad decisions," Rhule said. "To me this is about being in the moment but not making rash judgments. Guys are going to have good days and bad days. When we know, we know."

Darnold said his relationship with Mayfield has been very cordial, but he expects the competition to be fierce in training camp.

"We're both, in our eyes, the starting quarterback for this team right now," Darnold said. "And that's how we're both gonna view it. So it's just about going out there and competing, and that'll be fun."

Darnold admitted it took him a few days to "decompress" after learning about the Mayfield trade. But after the news sank in and he had a chance to talk with Rhule, Darnold called Mayfield to invite him to a throwing session the players were having prior to training camp.

Mayfield happily agreed to attend.

Griner: Poor translation clouded arrest

Associated Press

KHIMKI, Russia — American basketball star Brittney Griner testified Wednesday at her drug trial in Russia that a language interpreter translated only a fraction of what was said during her questioning and officials instructed her to sign documents without providing an explanation.

Griner was arrested at a Moscow airport in February. She acknowledged in court earlier this month that she had vape cartridges containing cannabis oil in her luggage when she arrived in Russia but contends she had no criminal intent and packed the cartridges inadvertently.

During her testimony, the Phoenix Mercury standout described making a grueling 13-hour flight to Moscow from Arizona while recovering from COVID-19. Griner said she still does not know how the cannabis oil ended up in her bag but explained she had a doctor's recommendation for it and had packed in haste.

She recalled getting pulled

aside at the airport on Feb. 17 after inspectors found the cartridges.

Along with the interpreter who provided an incomplete translation, Griner said she received neither an explanation of her rights nor access to a lawyer and was instructed to sign documents without an explanation of what they implied.

After hours of proceedings she did not understand, she was allowed to hand over her personal belongings to a lawyer before being led away in handcuffs, Griner said. She said she received only a cursory translation of the allegations during a Feb. 19 hearing where a court sanctioned her arrest.

Griner faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted of transporting drugs. Her trial started July 1, and Wednesday was her first appearance as a witness. The court outside Moscow held five previous sessions that were short, some lasting only about an hour.

It is unclear how long the trial will last, but a court has authorized Griner's detention until

Dec. 20. She went to Russia to play for a Russian team in the WNBA's off-season.

During Tuesday's court session of about 90 minutes, a Russian neuropsychologist testified about worldwide use of medicinal cannabis, which remains illegal in Russia. Griner's defense team has submitted a U.S. doctor's letter recommending the basketball player use medical cannabis to treat pain.

Griner testified Wednesday that she was suffering from pain from injuries sustained during her basketball career. She emphasized that cannabis oil is widely used in the United States for medicinal purposes and has less negative effects than some other painkillers.

A Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson said last week that the legalization of cannabis for medical and recreational use in parts of the U.S. had no bearing on what happens in Russia.

The slow-moving trial and Griner's five months of detention have raised strong criticism among teammates and support-

ters in the United States, which has formally declared her to be "wrongfully detained," a designation sharply rejected by Russian officials.

Griner was arrested in February amid high U.S.-Moscow tensions ahead of Russia sending troops into Ukraine later that month. Some supporters contend she is being held in Russia as a pawn, possibly for a prisoner swap. American soccer notable Megan Rapinoe last week said "she's being held as a political prisoner, obviously."

Russian media have speculated that Griner could be exchanged for prominent Russian arms trader Viktor Bout, who is imprisoned in the United States, and that Paul Whelan, an American imprisoned in Russia for espionage, may also figure in an exchange.

U.S. officials have not commented on the prospects for such a trade.

Russian officials have said no exchange could be discussed until the conclusion of the legal proceedings against Griner.

Ganassi suing Palou over IndyCar contract dispute

Associated Press

The fight over IndyCar champion Alex Palou is headed to court as Chip Ganassi Racing filed a civil lawsuit in Indiana against the Spanish driver who is attempting to leave the team at the end of the season.

Palou is in his second season driving for Ganassi. The team owner said he picked up the exclusive option he held on Palou for the 2023 season. Palou, meanwhile, says he informed CGR he does not intend to return for a third season, and McLaren Racing said it has signed the driver for next year.

The lawsuit filed in Marion County Superior Court in Indianapolis names both Palou and ALPA Racing, which is listed

as Palou's "racing entity" as defendants.

"Alex Palou is under contract with Chip Ganassi Racing through the end of the 2023 season," the team said in a Wednesday statement. "He is a valued member of our team, and we will continue to support him in chasing wins, podiums, and IndyCar championships.

"As the result of a competing racing team improperly attempting to contract with him notwithstanding the clear terms of our contract, we are proceeding to legal process pursuant to the contract. Any and all inquiries on the matter will be handled by our legal counsel."

McLaren Racing head Zak Brown has repeatedly told The

Associated Press that he signed Palou under the representation that Palou is a free agent. Brown has not decided where he'd use Palou, and the options range from a third seat in the IndyCar Series, a possible shot at a Formula One seat or even the new Formula E team it plans to launch next year.

Palou spent his first IndyCar season driving for Dale Coyne Racing in 2020 and then moved last year to Ganassi, where he won the championship and became the first driver since Dario Franchitti in 2012 to win races in Ganassi's No. 10 car.

Ganassi on July 12 said he'd exercised the option on 2023 for Palou. Hours later, Palou issued a series of tweets stating

he had no intention of returning to the team next year.

Minutes after Palou's tweets, McLaren said it had signed the driver.

Palou has come under heavy scrutiny in the IndyCar paddock as the drama unfolds, with teammate Scott Dixon among those most critical of the way he's handled the situation. Palou one month earlier had insisted he was not interested in leaving Ganassi, and now maintains his June statements were not a lie.

Palou is currently ranked sixth in the IndyCar standings, 44 points behind Indianapolis 500 winner and Ganassi teammate Marcus Ericsson. There are five races remaining in the season.

Mets rule first stop in Subway Series

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Eduardo Escobar crossed the plate and skipped joyfully back to the Mets dugout after his tiebreaking, two-run homer capped a four-run, first-inning rally — a drive a fan behind the left field fence caught one-handed with a leap.

Most of Citi Field was dancing by the time Edwin Díaz struck out Gleyber Torres with two on, ending the Mets' 6-3 win over the Yankees in Tuesday night's rare Subway Series matchup of first-place teams.

"It was honestly like a World Series home run," Escobar said through a translator. "I've

never played in an environment like that."

Aaron Judge and Anthony Rizzo quieted many of the 42,364 fans with opposite-field home runs on consecutive first-inning pitches from Taijuan Walker (8-2).

But the Mets stormed right back in the bottom half when Starling Marte homered with one out against Jordan Montgomery (3-3). Francisco Lindor and Pete Alonso followed with back-to-back doubles, and Escobar's two-run, two-out homer put the Mets ahead 4-2. The ball was caught barehanded by a fan in a Mets jersey and Yankees hat.

The Mets held on for a victory before just

their third home sellout this year, what they hoped is a World Series rehearsal. Both teams had been in first place when they met in only one previous season, a three-game series from April 24-26, 2015, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

"If we're playing against each other in November, that would be awesome," Alonso said before the game. "If that happens, the city will just be on fire."

Judge's major league-high 38th home run gave him 82 RBIs, tying for the big league lead. Alonso surged back ahead with his 83rd in the bottom half and went 3-for-3 with a walk.

Springer grand slam helps Blue Jays rout Cardinals

Associated Press

TORONTO — George Springer hit his seventh career grand slam, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. had a two-run drive and the Toronto Blue Jays extended their winning streak to seven by beating the short-handed St. Louis Cardinals 10-3 Tuesday night.

Alejandro Kirk added his 12th homer and Matt Chapman had two hits, including the tiebreaking single in a five-run sixth as Toronto improved to 8-1 under manager John Schneider.

Dylan Carlson hit a solo home run as St. Louis played the first of two games in Canada without unvaccinated sluggers Paul Goldschmidt and Nolan Arenado. The two biggest bats in the Cardinals lineup were placed on the restricted list before the game, along with catcher Austin Romine.

Nationals 8, Dodgers 3: Luis Garcia hit a two-run homer in the eighth inning and last-place Washington rallied to a win at Los Angeles, its second straight against the NL West leader.

Garcia's shot into the right-field seats with two outs against Dodgers left-hander Garrett Cleavinger (0-1) was his third home run of the season and brought home Josh Bell, who reached first on a throwing error by Los Angeles second baseman Gavin Lux.

Nationals right-hander Erasmo Hernandez (2-1) recorded two outs in the seventh inning to earn the victory.

Guardians 8, Red Sox 3: Nolan Jones hit a three-run homer, fellow rookie Steven Kwan had three hits and visiting Cleveland dampened Boston's celebration for newly minted Hall of Famer David Ortiz.

Minutes after the Cooperstown inductee proclaimed himself a good luck charm for his slumping former team, the Red Sox fell behind 5-0 on their way to a sixth loss in seven games. They have lost 14 of their last 18 to fall into last place in the AL East.

Angels 6, Royals 0: Shohei Ohtani and Max Stassi hit towering homers for visiting Los Angeles, and Luis Rengifo added a bases-loaded double to break open a close game in the seventh inning.

Jose Suarez (2-4) scattered three hits and a walk over 5½ innings before the Angels bullpen, which was hammered by the Royals in a series-opening loss, rolled through the same bunch to clinch their first win since July 13.

Mariners 5, Rangers 4: Cal Raleigh homered in the seventh inning, lined an RBI double in the ninth and scored the winning run on Carlos Santana's sacri-

fice fly, and host Seattle rallied past Texas.

J.P. Crawford led off the ninth with a single off Rangers reliever Brett Martin and scored from first when Raleigh lined a shot to the wall in right-center field. Raleigh was sacrificed to third base, and after Martin (0-6) issued intentional walks to Julio Rodríguez and Ty France to load the bases, Santana hit a fly ball to center field that was deep enough for Raleigh to score the winning run.

Braves 6, Phillies 3: Michael Harris II and Matt Olson homered, leading Atlanta to the victory at Philadelphia.

Dansby Swanson added three hits and Spencer Strider was sharp over six innings as the Braves remained the only team in baseball without a three-game losing streak this season. Austin Riley stretched his hitting streak to 18 games.

Orioles 5, Rays 3: Ramón Urías hit a two-run homer in the eighth inning off Colin Poche to lift host Baltimore and undo a marvelous start by Tampa Bay All-Star Shane Bieber.

McClanahan pitched seven innings of two-hit ball and was lifted with a 3-2 lead after throwing 81 pitches on a humid night. Poche (2-1) promptly gave up a leadoff single to Adley Rutschman and Urías followed by driv-

ing an 0-2 pitch over the left-field wall.

Brewers 7, Twins 6: Luis Urías delivered a game-ending sacrifice fly in the ninth inning for host Milwaukee.

White Sox 2, Rockies 1: Michael Kopech pitched shutout ball into the sixth inning, sending Chicago to the win at Colorado.

Athletics 5, Astros 3: Chad Pinder hit his second grand slam in two weeks to lead host Oakland, and Frankie Montas pitched five innings in what could be his final outing with the team.

Padres 6, Tigers 4 (10): Jorge Alfaro capped San Diego's three-run 10th inning with a two-run single as it won at Detroit.

Cubs 4, Pirates 2: Willson Contreras drew a standing ovation in perhaps his last home game at Wrigley Field, and then keyed an early burst as Chicago earned its season-high sixth straight win.

Diamondbacks 7, Giants 3: Christian Walker hit a three-run homer off a frustrated Carlos Rodón, and host Arizona handed San Francisco its sixth straight loss.

Marlins 2, Reds 1: Pablo López tied his career high with 11 strikeouts over seven dominant innings, leading Miami to the victory at Cincinnati.