

Xi warned Biden on Taiwan, Beijing says

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping spent more than two hours Thursday talking through the future of their complicated relationship, with the flashpoint of Taiwan once again emerging as a key point of tension.

According to a description of the call released by Beijing, Xi emphasized China's claim over the island, which has governed itself for decades.

"Those who play with fire will perish by it," said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "It is hoped that the U.S. will be clear-eyed about this."

The White House has not yet released its own readout on the call, which ran from 8:33 to 10:50 a.m.

As usual, China left no doubt that it blames the U.S. for the deteriorating relationship between the two countries.

"President Xi underscored

that to approach and define China-US relations in terms of strategic competition and view China as the primary rival and the most serious long-term challenge would be misperceiving China-U.S. relations and misreading China's development, and would mislead the people of the two countries and the international community," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

The call took place as Biden aims to find new ways to work with China and contain its influence around the world. Differing perspectives on global health, economic policy and human rights have long tested the relationship — with China's refusal to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine adding further strain.

The latest pressure point has been House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's potential visit to Taiwan, which has a democratic government and receives informal de-

fensive support from the U.S., but which China considers part of its territory. Beijing has said it would view such a trip as a provocation, a threat U.S. officials are taking with heightened seriousness in light of Russia's incursion into Ukraine.

"If the U.S. insists on going its own way and challenging China's bottom line, it will surely be met with forceful responses," Zhao Lijian, a spokesperson for China's Foreign Ministry, told reporters earlier this week. "All ensuing consequences shall be borne by the U.S."

Pelosi would be the highest-ranking U.S. elected official to travel to Taiwan since Republican Newt Gingrich visited the island in 1997 when he was House speaker. Biden last week told reporters that U.S. military officials believed it was "not a good idea" for the speaker to visit the island at the moment.

John Kirby, a U.S. national

security spokesman, said Wednesday that it was important for Biden and Xi to regularly touch base.

"The president wants to make sure that the lines of communication with President Xi remain open because they need to," Kirby told reporters at a White House briefing. "There are issues where we can cooperate with China on, and there are issues where obviously there are friction and tension."

Biden has moved to shift U.S. reliance off Chinese manufacturing, including Senate passage Wednesday of legislation to encourage semiconductor companies to build more high-tech plants in the U.S. Biden wants to marshal global democracies to support infrastructure investments in low- and middle-income nations as an alternative to China's "Belt and Road Initiative," which aims to boost China trade with other global markets.

4 drone ship prototypes get workout during RIMPAC

By Wyatt Olson

Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The U.S. Navy's four unmanned surface vessel prototypes are being tested together for the first time during the monthlong Rim of the Pacific maritime exercise that ends next week.

The Navy described the first-ever gathering of the prototypes in waters off Hawaii as a "milestone" in a news release Monday.

Sea Hunter and Seahawk, designated by the Navy as medium unmanned vessels, are 132 feet long. Nomad and Ranger, which are classified as large vessels, are about 195 feet long.

The Navy envisions a future fleet of such drone ships that will

operate seamlessly with manned ships.

"This is the largest event that these vessels have participated in, and RIMPAC is a very large exercise," Cmdr. Jeremiah Daley, who heads the San Diego-based Unmanned Surface Vessel Division One, said by phone Tuesday.

Division One was established in May to manage at-sea experimentation with the prototypes, looking at how unmanned vessels of this size could best be integrated with the Navy's manned ships. Knowledge gleaned will be used as the Navy embarks on developing and procuring an operational drone fleet.

Nomad and Ranger were de-

veloped under the Pentagon's Strategic Capabilities Office, with two similar prototypes still under development, according to a report Tuesday by the Congressional Research Service. The second pair are expected to be completed before the end of 2023. Sea Hunter and Seahawk were developed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

The four drone vessels participating in RIMPAC carry various payloads, the sensors, radars, communication devices or weapons they were designed to transport, Daley said.

"My charter and my role is to develop specific types of sensors and payloads as the warfighting operational commander desir-

es," he said.

The Defense Department released video in September of an SM-6 missile being launched from Ranger. The SM-6, or Standard Missile-6, is used for anti-air warfare, ballistic missile defense and anti-ship strikes.

"RIMPAC is a dedicated event that goes over the course of many weeks at sea so the opportunity to test and to integrate and to communicate tactically with manned platforms was a tremendous opportunity," Daley said.

The Navy requested just over \$600 million for research and development of an unmanned surface fleet during the next fiscal year, the Congressional Research Service said in its report.

Marine: Vaccine refusal order 'unlawful'

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — A Marine in Japan who refused a COVID-19 vaccine is being court-martialed for missing two flights to the United States to be discharged, the Marine Corps said Thursday.

Lance Cpl. Catherine Arnett, 24, is facing a special court-martial Aug. 3-4 on charges of missing a movement and disobeying a lawful order, according to the Navy and Marine Corps court docket.

Arnett said her troubles began last year when she missed a Marine Corps deadline to get vaccinated against the coronavirus.

In a video posted online Wednesday by the Children's Health Defense, an organization

that opposes vaccinations, Arnett said she considers the Defense Department's vaccine mandate an unlawful order, and anything flowing from it as also unlawful, including orders to return home and exit the Marine Corps.

"And if that means that they're moving me from point A to point B whenever I really shouldn't be moved, then I'm going to raise that issue with my chain of command," she told interviewer Stephanie Locricchio. "It's my duty to challenge unlawful orders."

Arnett is charged with missing movements on May 7 and 14 and for refusing an order to take a pre-flight COVID-19 test, according to an email Thursday from 1st Lt. Aaron Ellis, a

spokesman for Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni.

"LCpl Arnett is not being court-martialed for refusing COVID-19 vaccination," he wrote.

Arnett said she refused the COVID-19 vaccines because they are tested or produced using stem cell lines that descend from fetuses aborted in the 1970s and '80s. Her request as a Catholic for a religious exemption, she said, was denied by the Marine Corps and again on appeal.

"I believe that I'm protected from not having to get a vaccine if it contradicts my moral conscience or has components of it that now goes against my religious tenets," she told Stars and Stripes.

She told Locricchio: "I don't have to get this vaccine because I'm religiously, legally and administratively protected from it. I don't have to accept or participate in experimental drugs."

During the interview, Arnett said she considered becoming a conscientious objector to handling a rifle in the Marine Corps but did not seek a religious exemption to vaccines until 2021. She described feeling lightheaded after a battery of vaccinations in basic training at Parris Island, S.C., but had no serious side effects.

"Whenever I heard that you could have submitted, you know, an exemption to vaccines before you entered the military, let me just say I wish I had known that," she said.

Lawmakers worry over Guard numbers amid mandate

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — As an Arizona county braced for monsoon rains last week, nearly 100 members of the state's National Guard filled sandbags and helped with other flood recovery efforts.

That same week, Oklahoma's governor deployed the state's National Guard troops to support firefighters battling a raging wildfire.

Guard members are routinely called up for natural disasters and other emergencies. They have helped combat the coronavirus pandemic, patrolled the U.S. border with Mexico, contained protests over racial injustice in 2020, deployed to wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and responded to countless fires, floods and hurricanes.

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill worry these vital services could be curtailed if the tens of thousands of National Guard members and reservists who have not complied with the Defense Department's coronavirus vaccine mandate are discharged from the military.

"For decades, the National Guard has served as the backbone of saving Americans across the country in times of crisis," Rep.

Mike Waltz, R-Fla., wrote in an opinion piece for Fox News on Monday. "But when the next crisis comes to our shores, the U.S. will lack the number [of] Guardsmen and women to come to our rescue."

About 40,000 National Guard and 22,000 Reserve troops missed the vaccination deadline on June 30 and were subsequently cut off from some of their benefits and barred from participating in federal training, drills and other military duties.

Nearly a month later, the numbers have ticked down slightly. About 10% of the 336,000 Army National Guard troops, or approximately 33,600 members, had not received at least one vaccine shot as of Monday. In the total National Guard force of 440,000 soldiers and airmen, about 39,600 remain unvaccinated, according to the National Guard Bureau.

The number of Army and Air Force reservists who are not fully vaccinated continues to hover at about 20,000, most of them soldiers. Army Reserve and Army National Guard members were given seven months longer to receive the vaccine than any other service member in the military.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin last year

ordered all active-duty, Guard and Reserve service members to get vaccinated and has said unvaccinated troops could face expulsion.

The potential loss of those troops, particularly amid the worst military recruiting environment since the Vietnam War, has raised alarms on Capitol Hill.

At a congressional hearing last week, Waltz, a colonel in the Army National Guard who is vaccinated, pressed Gen. Joseph Martin, the Army's vice chief of staff, for a contingency plan.

"We're talking about states potentially losing up to 20% to 30% of their guardsmen and women, replacing them in a very difficult recruiting environment, much less getting them trained to the capability they once were," Waltz said. "I don't know how you get there."

Martin cautioned a decision on possible separations is still pending and expressed confidence that the new Novavax COVID-19 vaccine could boost compliance. The two-dose vaccine is based on conventional technology used in vaccines for the flu, whooping cough and hepatitis B and will be available in the coming weeks.

US economy shrinks 0.9% last quarter

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. economy shrank from April through June for a second straight quarter, contracting at a 0.9% annual pace and raising fears the nation may be approaching a recession.

The decline the Commerce Department reported Thursday in the gross domestic product — the broadest gauge of the economy — followed a 1.6% annual drop from January through March. Consecutive quarters of falling GDP constitute one informal, though not definitive, indicator of a recession.

The report comes at a critical time. Consumers and businesses have been struggling under the weight of punishing inflation and higher borrowing costs. On Wednesday, the Federal Reserve raised its benchmark interest rate by a sizable three-quarters of a point for a second

straight time in its push to conquer the worst inflation outbreak in four decades.

The Fed is hoping to achieve a notoriously difficult “soft landing”: An economic slowdown that manages to rein in rocketing prices without triggering a recession.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell and many economists have said that while the economy is showing some weakening, they doubt it's in recession. Many of them point, in particular, to a still-robust labor market, with 11 million job openings and an uncommonly low 3.6% unemployment rate, to suggest that a recession, if one does occur, is still a ways off.

Thursday's first of three government estimates of GDP for the April-June quarter marks a drastic weakening from the 5.7% growth the economy achieved last year.

That was the fastest calendar-year expansion since 1984, reflecting how vigorously the economy roared back from the brief but brutal pandemic recession of 2020.

But since then, the combination of mounting prices and higher borrowing costs have taken a toll. The Labor Department's consumer price index skyrocketed 9.1% in June from a year earlier, a pace not matched since 1981. And despite widespread pay raises, prices are surging faster than wages. In June, average hourly earnings, after adjusting for inflation, slid 3.6% from a year earlier, the 15th straight year-over-year drop.

The inflation surge and fear of a recession have eroded consumer confidence and stirred public anxiety about the economy, which is sending frustratingly mixed signals. And with the November midterm elec-

tions nearing, Americans' discontent has diminished President Joe Biden's public approval ratings and increased the likelihood the Democrats will lose control of the House and Senate.

Consumer spending is still growing, but Americans are losing confidence. Their assessment of economic conditions six months from now has reached its lowest point since 2013, according to the Conference Board, a research group.

Recession risks have been growing as the Fed's policymakers have pursued a campaign of rate hikes that will likely extend into 2023. The Fed's hikes have already led to higher rates on credit cards and auto loans and to a doubling of the average rate on a 30-year fixed mortgage in the past year, to 5.5. Home sales, which are especially sensitive to interest rate changes, have tumbled.

Judges block abortion bans in Wyoming, North Dakota

Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. — Abortion bans set to take effect this week in Wyoming and North Dakota have been temporarily blocked by judges in those states amid lawsuits arguing the bans violate their state constitutions.

A judge in Wyoming on Wednesday sided with a fire-bombed women's health clinic and others who argued the ban would harm health care workers and their patients, while a North Dakota judge sided with the state's only abortion clinic, Red River Women's Clinic in Fargo. The Wyoming law was set to take effect Wednesday, while the North Dakota law was set to take effect Thursday.

Meanwhile, West Virginia lawmakers moved ahead with a ban amid protests and dozens

speaking against the measure.

During hours of debate leading up to the 69-23 vote in the Republican-dominated House of Delegates in West Virginia, the sound of screams and chants from protesters standing outside the chamber rang through the room. The latest court action in North Dakota and Wyoming put them among several states including Kentucky, Louisiana and Utah where judges have temporarily blocked implementation of “trigger laws” while lawsuits play out.

Attorneys arguing before Teton County District Judge Melissa Owens, in Jackson, Wyo., disagreed over whether the state constitution provided a right to abortion that would nullify the state's abortion “trigger” law that took effect Wednesday.

DOD contractor, wife accused of conspiracy

Associated Press

HONOLULU — A U.S. defense contractor and his wife who lived for decades under the identities of two dead Texas children have been charged with identity theft and conspiring against the government, according to federal court records unsealed in Honolulu.

Walter Glenn Primrose and Gwynn Darle Morrison, both in their 60s, who allegedly lived for decades under the names Bobby Edward Fort and Julie Lyn Montague, respectively, were arrested Friday in Kapolei on the island of Oahu.

Prosecutors are seeking to have the couple held without bail, which could indicate the case is about more than fraudulently obtaining drivers' licenses, passports and Defense De-

partment credentials.

Those documents helped Primrose get secret security clearance with the U.S. Coast Guard and as a defense contractor, and old photos show the couple wearing uniforms of the KGB, the former Russian spy agency, Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas Muehleck said in court papers. Polaroids of each in uniform were included in the motion to have them held.

A “close associate” said Morrison lived in Romania while it was a Soviet bloc country, Muehleck said. Morrison's attorney, Megan Kau, said her client never lived in Romania and that she and Primrose tried the jacket on as a joke. Even if the couple used new identities, Kau said they have lived law-abiding lives for three decades.

Russia attacks Kyiv area first time in weeks

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian forces launched a missile attack on the Kyiv area for the first time in weeks Thursday and pounded the northern Chernihiv region as well, in what Ukraine said was revenge for standing up to the Kremlin.

Ukrainian officials, meanwhile, announced a counteroffensive to take back the Kherson region in the south, territory seized by Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces early in the war.

Russia attacked the Kyiv region with six missiles launched from the Black Sea, hitting a military unit in the village of Liutizh on the outskirts of the capital, ac-

cording to Oleksii Hromov, a senior official with Ukraine's General Staff.

He said the attack ruined one building and damaged two others, and that Ukrainian forces also shot down one of the missiles in the town of Bucha.

Fifteen people were wounded in the Russian strikes, five of them civilians, Kyiv regional Gov. Oleksiy Kuleba said. He linked the assaults to the Day of Statehood, a commemoration that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy instituted last year and Ukraine marked for the time on Thursday.

"Russia, with the help of missiles, is mounting revenge for the widespread popular resistance,

which the Ukrainians were able to organize precisely because of their statehood," Kuleba told Ukrainian television. "Ukraine has already broken Russia's plans and will continue to defend itself."

Chernihiv regional Gov. Vyacheslav Chaus reported that the Russians also fired missiles from the territory of Belarus at the village of Honcharivska. The Chernihiv region had not been targeted in weeks.

Russian troops withdrew from the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions months ago after failing to capture either. The renewed strikes came a day after the leader of pro-Kremlin separatists in the east, Denis Pushilin, urged Rus-

sian forces to "liberate Russian cities founded by the Russian people — Kyiv, Chernihiv, Poltava, Odesa, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, Lutsk."

Elsewhere, five people were killed and 25 wounded in a Russian rocket attack on the city of Kropyvnytskyi, according to the deputy governor the Kirovohrad region, Andriy Raikovich. He said it hit hangars at an air academy, damaging civilian planes.

Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, also came under a barrage of shelling overnight, according to the mayor. Authorities said a police officer was killed in Russian shelling of a power plant in the Kharkiv region.

Kremlin says US prisoner swap must be done quietly

Associated Press

MOSCOW — The Kremlin warned Thursday that a possible prisoner swap with the United States involving American basketball star Brittney Griner needs to be negotiated quietly without fanfare.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday that Washington had offered Russia a deal that would bring home Griner and another jailed American, Paul Whelan. A person familiar with the matter said the U.S. government proposed trading convicted Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout for Whelan and Griner.

Asked about the U.S. offer, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov replied that prisoner swaps were typically negotiated discreetly behind the scenes.

"We know that such issues are discussed without any such release of information," Peskov told reporters during a conference call. "Normally, the public learns about it when the agreements are already implemented."

He emphasized that "no agree-

ments have been finalized" and refused to provide further details.

In a separate statement, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Russian and U.S. officials have conducted negotiations about possible prisoner exchanges and "there has been no concrete result yet."

"We proceed from the assumption that interests of both parties should be taken into account during the negotiations," Zakharova said.

Russia has for years expressed interest in the release of Bout, a Russian arms dealer once labeled the "Merchant of Death." He was sentenced to 25 years in prison in 2012 on charges that he schemed to illegally sell millions of dollars in weapons.

Whelan, a corporate security executive from Michigan, was sentenced to 16 years in prison on espionage charges in 2020. He and his family have vigorously asserted his innocence. The U.S. government has denounced the charges as false.

Japanese city alarmed by biting, clawing monkeys

Associated Press

TOKYO — People in a southwestern Japanese city have come under attack from monkeys that are biting and clawing at flesh, trying to snatch babies and sneaking into nursery schools.

The attacks — on 58 people since July 8 — are getting so bad that Yamaguchi city hall hired a special unit to hunt the animals with tranquilizer guns.

The monkeys aren't interested in food, so traps haven't worked. They have targeted mostly children and the elderly.

"They are so smart, and they tend to sneak up and attack from behind, often grabbing at your legs," city official Masato Saito said Wednesday.

When confronted by a monkey, the instructions are: Do not look them in the eye, make yourself look as big as possible, such as by spreading open your coat, then back away as quietly as possible without making sudden moves, according to Saito.

A woman was assaulted by a monkey while hanging laundry

on her veranda. Another victim showed bandaged toes. They were taken aback and frightened by how big and fat the monkeys were.

The monkeys terrorizing the community are Japanese macaque, the kind often pictured peacefully bathing in hot springs.

One male monkey, measuring 1.6 feet in height and weighing 15 pounds, was caught Tuesday by the team with the tranquilizer gun. It was judged by various evidence to be one of the attacking monkeys and put to death.

But more attacks were reported after the capture.

No one has been seriously injured so far. But all have been advised to get hospital treatment. Ambulances were called in some cases.

No one seems to know why the attacks have occurred, and where exactly the troop of monkeys came from remains unclear.

"I have never seen anything like this my entire life," Saito said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Burglar forgot keys inside crime scene

CA SAN RAFAEL — A Northern California burglar returned to the scene of the crime last weekend after he forgot his keys inside a doughnut company's corporate office.

The thief stole some petty cash from Johnny Doughnuts' office in the San Francisco Bay Area on Saturday night, police said. He also grabbed the keys to a bakery vehicle, but didn't steal the vehicle.

San Rafael police are seeking the public's help to identify the burglar, who used a tool to "manipulate" the office's doorknob and get inside around 10 p.m., according to Lt. Dan Fink. The crime was reported Monday.

Surveillance video showed the man moving between the office and a back storage area, where he pried open a filing cabinet, Fink said. He said the thief took a bank bag with an unknown amount of cash.

Craig Blum, founder of Johnny Doughnuts, said his company plans to deliver a few dozen doughnuts to the San Rafael police officers "who came to our aid to ensure that we can continue serving our community hand-crafted doughnuts without interruption."

US: Man used fake checks to try to post others' bail

HI HONOLULU — A Hawaii man accused of using counterfeit bank checks totaling \$1.2 million to try to bail three people out of a jail has been arrested and ordered held without bail, according to court records.

Samuela Tuikolongahau Jr.

was detained by federal authorities on Monday. A U.S. Secret Service affidavit filed in court alleged that he presented the bank checks for \$760,000, \$400,000 and \$50,000 in 2020 during the attempt to post bail for the three people held at the Oahu Community Correctional Center.

He left a Honolulu courthouse after being told the checks would need verification, the court document said. Officials determined the checks were counterfeit and the two men and woman he tried to get out of jail were not released.

Sheriff: Man starts fires, tied to tree by locals

OR SALEM — A man who reportedly ignited wildfires in a remote, forested corner of Oregon was apprehended by three residents and tied to a tree until police arrived, a sheriff said Tuesday.

Federal, state and county authorities responded to a radio call Monday from a U.S. Bureau of Land Management employee who reported a man was walking along a gravel road and setting fires, in the forest some 25 miles northwest of Grants Pass. Ground crews, assisted by local residents, and three helicopters quickly got the two fires under control, Curry County Sheriff John Ward said.

Meanwhile, three residents located the suspect walking on the road near the fires and detained him.

"It was reported that the suspect became very combative with the three residents and had to be tied to a tree to subdue him," Ward said in a statement.

After being treated at a hospi-

tal for injuries from a fall, Trennon Smith, 30, of Veneta, Ore., was being held on Tuesday in the Curry County jail on charges of arson and reckless burning, Ward said.

12-year-old behind the wheel dies in crash

MD COLUMBIA — A 12-year-old girl died after the car she was driving ran off the road and struck a tree in Maryland.

Howard County Police said the girl was driving a Toyota Corolla on Broken Land Parkway around 2 a.m. Sunday when the accident occurred.

The girl was pronounced dead at the scene. A male passenger, 36, was taken to the University of Maryland Shock Trauma Center in Baltimore with serious injuries.

Police were investigating Sunday why the 12-year-old was behind the wheel.

Sheriff: Woman intent on revenge set house on fire

NC SALISBURY — A North Carolina woman apparently seeking revenge on her ex-boyfriend tried to set fire to a house owned by someone else, according to a sheriff's office.

The Rowan County Sheriff's Office said in a report that a homeowner in Gold Hill was awakened Friday by a neighbor who saw a woman trying to set fire to the house. There were bundles of wood and a fire on the front porch and deputies found a jug of oil that they say was used to start the fire.

As the homeowner went to get a garden hose, he saw burning pieces of wood around a pro-

pane tank. The garden hose didn't work because the woman had apparently used a sealant to block the flow of water, deputies said.

The homeowner grabbed a rifle and confronted the woman, who was holding one of his dogs on a leash. With law enforcement and emergency personnel approaching, the woman drove off, the sheriff's office reported.

Deputies arrested the woman and charged her with felony first-degree arson, assault with a deadly weapon, and larceny of an animal.

Aldrin flight-to-moon jacket sells for \$2.8M

NY NEW YORK — Buzz Aldrin's jacket worn on his historic first mission to the moon's surface in 1969 has been auctioned off to a bidder for nearly \$2.8 million.

The \$2,772,500 paid for the Apollo 11 Inflight Coverall Jacket is the highest for any American space-flown artifact sold at auction, according to Sotheby's, which handled the sale. The unidentified winning bidder participated by phone.

The jacket displays Aldrin's name tag on the left breast above the Apollo 11 mission emblem, and the American flag on the left shoulder. It is made of a fire-resistant material known as Beta cloth that was incorporated in spacesuits in response to the fire that killed three astronauts aboard Apollo 1 in 1967, according to Sotheby's.

Aldrin and Neil Armstrong became the first astronauts to walk on the moon on July 20, 1969.

— From wire reports

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Brady's back, but there's more to Bucs

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Tom Brady is back for a 23rd season, his third with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

But that's hardly the only major storyline for the defending NFC South champions as they begin training camp.

Todd Bowles is starting his second stint as an NFL head coach and the Bucs are stockpiling high-profile offensive talent to help Brady pursue an eighth Super Bowl title — as evidenced by the signing Wednesday of seven-time Pro Bowl receiver Julio Jones.

Brady, who turns 45 soon, led the NFL in passing yards and touchdowns last season and cited “unfinished business” as one of the reasons he decided to end the brief retirement he announced in February.

The Bucs did have another retirement to contend with: tight end Rob Gronkowski, who announced he was stepping away — again — in June. They signed veteran Kyle Rudolph as his replacement.

“We’ve got to replace Gronk’s catches. We’ve got an

extra weapon, especially in the red zone and out in the field, and we’re going to put him to use,” Bowles said of Jones. “It gives us a chance to be more creative in some of the things we do. We’re happy to have him.”

Jones played 10 seasons for the NFC South rival Atlanta Falcons before injuries sidelined him for seven games two seasons ago and contributed to the worst statistics of his career with the Tennessee Titans last season (31 receptions for 434 yards and one touchdown in 10 games).

The Titans then released the 33-year-old receiver, who has 879 catches for 13,330 yards and 61 touchdowns over 11 seasons.

“I’m looking forward. I’m not looking backward,” Jones said. “It’s a great opportunity for me to be a part of something special. ... Just looking forward to getting to work.”

The Bucs topped Jones’ wish list for potential destinations: A chance to play with Brady and pursue a Super Bowl ring simply was too good to pass up.

“It’s a surreal moment. It’s amazing. I’m ready to go,” Jones said. “At the end of the day, it’s all about accountability. I have to be accountable for him, the team and everybody.”

Jones is now part of an already dynamic group of playmakers, including receivers Mike Evans, Russell Gage and Chris Godwin, who’s recovering from surgery to repair the anterior cruciate ligament and medial collateral ligament in his right knee.

“When all is said and done, I’ve still got to come to work. I still have to put the work in,” Jones said. “You can see Julio is with the Bucs, and we’ve got Mike (Evans), we’ve got Tom (Brady), but we’ve all got to put the work in. Nobody is going to give us anything.”

Bowles is the one who’ll be responsible for a cohesive team. He succeeds Bruce Arians, who announced his retirement in March shortly after Brady ended his six-week retirement.

But Bowles has been a part of the Bucs since 2019, when he became defensive coordinator.

Prior to that, he went 24-40 over four seasons as coach of the New York Jets from 2015 to 2018.

The 58-year-old who played eight seasons in the NFL joked Wednesday that “we might be here for 24 hours” if he tried to detail the difference between taking over the Bucs now as opposed to the Jets seven years ago.

“When you’re a first-time head coach, no matter what they tell you, there are some things that are going to happen that you’re going to have to deal with that you’re not sure about making decisions that you have to make them on,” Bowles said after practice.

“Having seen everything, understanding my strengths, my weaknesses, understanding everyone around me — it’s different because I’ve been here for three years,” Bowles added. “I didn’t have to build a staff and get acclimated to the building or anything else like that. So that part, from a camaraderie standpoint, that’s been great. It really feels like it hasn’t changed for me.”

Old-guy quarterbacks give Big Ten different look

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The story of Sean Clifford and Tanner Morgan’s began on a seventh-grade football field.

Their final scheduled matchup is Oct. 22 when Minnesota visits Penn State.

In between, the two quarterbacks followed one another’s journeys through high school and the recruiting process, the natural ups and downs of college football and the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, they’re embarking on one final destination together — a sixth and final college season.

“To think that both of us, with our old asses, are still playing on the biggest stages, it’s very cool

because that friendship is so deep,” Clifford said Wednesday at the Big Ten media day. “We’re still playing at the highest level and now getting to play Tanner this year, it’s going to be a lot of fun.”

Both enter the fall with plenty of unfulfilled goals.

Clifford begins his fourth season as Penn State’s starter at age 24, as the new face of a national movement to help college football players and as the CEO of his own NIL company. But he hasn’t led the Nittany Lions to the East Division crown or played in the College Football Playoff — yet.

Morgan, slightly younger at age 23, has two nine-win sea-

sons on his résumé and took the Golden Gophers to three of the school’s 22 bowl bids. Morgan and three other super seniors — the self-described Encore Four — are chasing their first West Division crown and coach P.J. Fleck believes Morgan’s experience can help his team finally pull it off.

“Tanner Morgan has been around the league, it seems like forever,” Fleck said. “He’s got his bachelor’s degree, his master’s degree, and now he’s kind of a non-major student, just taking classes and going to lead our football team. He got married here a few weeks ago.”

Morgan’s not alone in the marriage department — at Min-

nesota or around the league.

But in a sport that has changed dramatically since Clifford and Morgan first arrived on campus as redshirt freshmen in 2017, the league’s quarterback carousel appears remarkably stable.

Purdue quarterback Aidan O’Connell joins the six-year club and he’s getting married Saturday.

Graham Mertz, Taulia Tagovailoa and Payton Thorne return as starters at Wisconsin, Maryland and Michigan State.

Most eyes will be trained on Ohio State’s incumbent, C.J. Stroud, a Heisman Trophy finalist who threw for 4,435 yards and 44 touchdown passes.

NASCAR, IndyCar ready to share stage

Associated Press

Denny Hamlin ate dinner next to the winning Pocono Raceway trophy, opened the celebratory champagne awarded to the victor and enjoyed a glass with his meal.

It was an advertisement: “Live on EBay. 1 tainted trophy and 1 used bottle of champagne,” he posted on social media.

The first Cup winner to be disqualified since April 17, 1960, hasn’t shied away from poking fun at the predicament Joe Gibbs Racing found itself in when the Toyotas of Hamlin and runner-up Kyle Busch failed post-race inspection Sunday at Pocono. Hamlin even shoved a clear piece of tape into the mouth of the eagle on the trophy to represent the illegal tape NASCAR says it found on the two JGR cars after the race.

He estimated the clear tape — because it stripped him of the victory and all the spoils that come with a win — was “worth about 300k. (Not to be included in sale).”

Chase Elliott is unlikely to bid on any of the items. He was eventually declared the winner of Sunday’s race.

NASCAR’s most popular driver has no interest in earning trophies that way.

“I don’t think any driver wants to win that way — I certainly don’t,” Elliott said.

And that’s how NASCAR heads into this shared weekend with IndyCar on the road course at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Kurt Busch missed Sunday’s race with concussion-like symptoms, and on the IndyCar side, two-time series champion Josef Newgarden wouldn’t know if he can race until a Thursday evaluation.

Newgarden collapsed and hit his head roughly 90 minutes after he’d been cleared by IndyCar’s medical staff following a hard crash while leading at Iowa Speedway.

IndyCar is coming off an action-packed weekend that rivalled its marquee events at Indianapolis, St. Petersburg, Long Beach and Toronto, and raised the bar for what promoters could be doing to promote a series that trails NASCAR in popularity.

“Everybody that isn’t Hy-Vee and Penske Entertainment, the people who brought Iowa together this way, can learn from

this weekend because every single IndyCar weekend has to be like this,” said Pato O’Ward, who finished second on Saturday and won Sunday following Newgarden’s crash.

The reward was a championship chase that has tightened to six drivers separated by 44 points with five races remaining. Newgarden was the points leader when he was dominating Sunday’s race, but he dropped to a tie for third with Scott Dixon following his crash.

Now his title chances hinge on being cleared to race Saturday: Should Newgarden be benched, it would most certainly cost him his shot at a third IndyCar title.

And that’s where Roger Penske and his committee misdeed taking a big swing at drumming up major interest in this weekend’s IMS doubleheader. Penske owns the track and the doubleheader weekend is his to promote, except now his star driver is questionable. If Newgarden can’t race, then its a throwaway for the No. 2 and it doesn’t really matter where the driver finishes.

Santino Ferrucci has been a super-sub of late, was 10th in

the Indy 500 and is a fine choice for a standby driver. But with NASCAR also scheduled to be in town, there seems to be a deep pool of candidates that Penske could have chosen from.

Among them? Reigning NASCAR champion Kyle Larson raised his hand as interested in standing by for Newgarden and fans went wild over the idea of Larson in an Indy car. Sage Karam is scheduled to drive the Xfinity Series race but also said he’s interested in double duty. IndyCar veteran Tony Kanaan was going to be at the track anyway, and the list goes on and on.

Juan Pablo Montoya just raced the road course in May in an Indy car and is a former Penske driver, and then there’s Cup rookie Austin Cindric, who once thought he’d be an IndyCar driver but instead found his way to NASCAR.

Of course, all these hypotheticals could be for naught and Newgarden could be cleared to race Saturday. Either way, both NASCAR and IndyCar head to IMS with a slew of juicy storylines and the potential for an action-packed weekend on the hallowed grounds.

Four-time F1 champion Vettel retiring after season

Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary — Four-time Formula One champion Sebastian Vettel will retire at the end of the season to spend more time with his family, the German driver said Thursday.

Vettel won his four F1 titles from 2010-13 with the Red Bull team. His last race victory came with Ferrari in 2019.

This season with Aston Martin, he has been largely unsuccessful with a best finish of sixth place.

“The decision to retire has been a difficult one for me to

take, and I have spent a lot of time thinking about it,” Vettel said. “At the end of the year I want to take some more time to reflect on what I will focus on next; it is very clear to me that, being a father, I want to spend more time with my family.”

Vettel won 53 races, the third-highest total in F1 behind Lewis Hamilton (103) and Michael Schumacher (91). He won an F1 record 13 races in 2013.

Vettel became the youngest world champion at 23 in 2010 and later became the third

driver to win four consecutive championships after F1 greats Juan Miguel Fangio and Schumacher. Mercedes driver Hamilton has since joined them.

“I love this sport. It has been central to my life since I can remember,” Vettel posted in a video on his Instagram. “But as much as there is life on track, there is my life off track, too. Being a racing driver has never been my sole identity.”

Vettel’s title bids with Ferrari were unsuccessful after promising starts were undone by driver errors under pressure. He led the standings at

the midway point in 2017 and was in contention the following year, only to lose both championships to Hamilton. He crashed from the pole position at the Singapore GP in 2017 and swerved off track into the barriers when comfortably leading the rain-soaked German GP the following year.

He was stunned when Ferrari did not renew his contract after he struggled to compete alongside newcomer Charles Leclerc in 2019, and again in 2020. He thought about retiring then, before joining Racing Point in 2021.

Mets win in 9th inning, sweep Yankees

Associated Press

NEW YORK — With two first-place teams on the field, the New York Mets made this Subway Series a one-way ride.

Starling Marte singled home the winning run in the bottom of the ninth inning, and the Mets beat the crosstown Yankees 3-2 Wednesday night for a two-game sweep.

Max Scherzer was marvelous on his 38th birthday, striking out Aaron Judge three times to help the Mets take a 2-0 lead into the eighth. Gleyber Torres tied it with a two-run homer off reliever David Peterson, normally a starter.

"Every time Max had to make a pitch, he made it," Mets manager Buck Showalter said. "Just so strong mentally."

Pete Alonso homered early off Domingo Germán, and Francisco Lindor had an RBI single for the Mets before a sell-out crowd of 43,693 at Citi Field.

Making his Subway Series

debut, Scherzer permitted five hits over seven innings and struck out six — including Judge in two big situations. The Yankees went 0-for 15 with runners in scoring position during the series.

"Actually, I thought we played a really good game," Boone said. "I thought we had the right at-bats against Scherzer. We hit into some tough luck in some big spots."

Cardinals 6, Blue Jays 1: Albert Pujols hit a three-run homer and finished with three hits, and visiting St. Louis stopped Toronto's seven-game winning streak.

Athletics 4, Astros 2: Cole Irvin allowed four hits in seven innings, and host Oakland earned its first sweep in 32 series this season.

Mariners 3, Rangers 2: Julio Rodríguez hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the seventh off Jon Gray (7-5), a day after the 21-year-old rookie sensation had a leadoff home run in the

first, and host Seattle finished a three-game sweep.

Dodgers 7, Nationals 1: Hanser Alberto had a two-run double during a six-run first as host Los Angeles avoided a three-game sweep.

Brewers 10, Twins 4: Rowdy Tellez hit a pair of three-run homers, Corbin Burnes won his fifth straight decision and host Milwaukee swept a two-game series between Central Division leaders.

Reds 5, Marlins 3: Luis Castillo pitched seven effective innings in likely his final start with host Cincinnati.

Phillies 7, Braves 2: Alec Bohm hit a go-ahead single in a five-run fifth and added an RBI double in the sixth, helping host Philadelphia take two of three from Atlanta.

Rays 6, Orioles 4 (10): Randy Arozarena hit a two-run double off All-Star reliever Jorge López in the 10th inning, and visiting Tampa Bay stopped a four-game losing streak.

Guardians 7, Red Sox 6:

Josh Naylor hit a solo homer in the ninth inning, and visiting Cleveland took advantage of three errors by Boston first baseman Franchy Cordero.

Angels 4, Royals 0: Janson Junk (1-0) pitched five-plus innings of four-hit ball for visiting Los Angeles, earning his first major league win.

Tigers 4, Padres 3: Victor Reyes hit a two-out, two-run double in the ninth off Taylor Rogers (1-5), a drive over right fielder Nomar Mazara to lift host Detroit.

Diamondbacks 5, Giants 3: Josh Rojas homered and Arizona scored two runs on Jose Herrera's squeeze bunt in the seventh inning to extend visiting San Francisco's losing streak to seven.

Rockies 6, White Sox 5: Elias Díaz hit a two-run single after Kendall Graveman (3-2) walked the bases loaded in the ninth inning to lift host Colorado.

Yanks get Benintendi from Royals for 3 prospects

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The New York Yankees acquired All-Star outfielder Andrew Benintendi from the Kansas City Royals for three minor league pitchers on Wednesday night in what could be the first in a flurry of moves ahead of next week's trade deadline.

The AL East leaders sent right-handers Chandler Champlain and Beck Way to the Royals along with left-hander T.J. Sikkema.

A 28-year-old left-handed hitter, Benintendi was among 10 Royals who missed a four-game series at Toronto from July 14-17 because he was not vaccinated. Benintendi lost \$186,813 of the \$8.5 million salary he won in an arbitration case against the Royals.

New York believes he is ame-

nable to getting vaccinated. No Yankees missed earlier trips to Toronto this season, and the Yankees have a three-game series there from Sept. 26-28.

Benintendi is hitting .320 with three homers, 39 RBIs and a .788 OPS. He won a Gold Glove in left field last year, and he hasn't made an error this season, earning his first All-Star selection.

Benintendi, who is eligible for free agency after this season, gives the Yankees another outfield option alongside Aaron Judge and Aaron Hicks.

Giancarlo Stanton, who has played 38 games in the outfield, is expected to miss at least two to three weeks after going on the injured list this week with left Achilles tendinitis. Joey Gallo is hitting .161 with 103 strikeouts in 230 at-bats, be-

coming a frequent target of fan boos.

New York has increasingly used 36-year-old Matt Carpenter in the outfield, where he had not played since 2014.

Yankees manager Aaron Boone disputed the notion that the Yankees have too many power hitters in their lineup. Benintendi should improve a team that is batting .214 left-handed and .258 right-handed.

"We've got savages in the lineup, and really good hitters. Benintendi's a great hitter, gets on base at a really high clip, hits from the left side, so, yeah, gives you some balance," Boone said after Wednesday night's 3-2 loss at the Mets and just before the trade was announced.

On Wednesday, Benintendi went 1-for-4 in Kansas City's 4-0 loss to the Angels. On

Thursday night, the Royals were set to open a series at Yankee Stadium.

Benintendi has a .261 average with seven homers and 20 RBIs in 30 games at Yankee Stadium. He finished second to Judge in 2017 AL Rookie of the Year voting and won a World Series title with Boston the following year.

Champlain, 23, was a ninth-round draft pick last year and was 2-5 with a 4.30 ERA in 15 starts and one relief appearance at Class A Tampa.

Sikkema, 24, was taken in competitive balance round A of the 2019 draft and was 1-1 with a 2.48 ERA in 10 starts and one relief appearance at Class A Hudson Valley.

Way, 22, was a fourth-round pick two years ago and was 5-5 with a 3.73 ERA in 15 starts at Hudson Valley.