

## Republicans cheer a bandaged Trump

*Associated Press*

MILWAUKEE — Two days after surviving an attempted assassination, former President Donald Trump appeared triumphantly at the Republican National Convention's opening night with a bandage over his right ear, the latest compelling scene in a presidential campaign already defined by dramatic turns.

GOP delegates cheered wildly when Trump appeared on-screen backstage and then emerged in the arena, visibly emotional, as musician Lee Greenwood sang "God Bless the USA." That was hours after the convention had formally nominated the former president to head the Republican ticket in November against President Joe Biden.

Trump, accompanied by a wall of Secret Service agents, did

not address the hall — with his acceptance speech scheduled for Thursday — but smiled silently and occasionally waved as Greenwood sang. He eventually joined his newly announced running mate, Ohio Sen. JD Vance, to listen to the night's remaining speeches, often with a subdued expression and muted reactions uncharacteristic for the unabashed showman.

The raucous welcome underscored the depth of the crowd's affection for the man who won the 2016 nomination as an outsider, at odds with the party establishment, but has vanquished all Republican rivals, silenced most conservative critics and now commands loyalty up and down the party ranks.

"We must unite as a party, and we must unite as a nation," said Republican Party Chairman Michael Whatley, Trump's hand-

picked party leader, as he opened Monday's prime-time national convention session. "We must show the same strength and resilience as President Trump and lead this nation to a greater future."

But Whatley and other Republican leaders made clear that their calls for harmony did not extend to Biden and Democrats, who find themselves still riven by worries that the 81-year-old question is not up to the job of defeating Trump.

"Their policies are a clear and present danger to America, to our institutions, our values and our people," said Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson, welcoming the party to his battleground state, which Trump won in 2016 but lost to Biden four years ago.

Saturday's shooting at a Pennsylvania rally, where Trump was injured and one man died,

were clearly in mind, but the proceedings were celebratory — a stark contrast to the anger and anxiety that had marked the previous few days. Some delegates chanted "fight, fight, fight" — the same words that Trump was seen shouting to the crowd Saturday as the Secret Service ushered him off the stage, his fist raised and face bloodied.

"We should all be thankful right now that we are able to cast our votes for President Donald J. Trump after what took place on Saturday," said New Jersey state Sen. Michael Testa as he announced all of his state's 12 delegates for Trump.

When Trump cleared the necessary number of delegates, video screens in the arena read "OVER THE TOP" while the song "Celebration" played and delegates danced and waved Trump signs.

## Vance credits Marine Corps service for his success

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Long before J.D. Vance became the Republican nominee for vice president, he was known as Cpl. James D. Hamel, a combat correspondent in the Marine Corps.

Vance, now a senator from Ohio, enlisted after graduating from high school in 2003 and served for four years, including a six-month stint in Iraq beginning in late 2005.

The experience "taught me how to live like an adult," Vance wrote in his memoir, "Hillbilly Elegy." It also reportedly makes him the first Marine veteran to be a vice-presidential candidate.

Vance, 39, served with the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point in North Carolina, according to his service record.

He enlisted, never having run a mile continuously or knowing how to manage money.

"When I joined the Marine Corps, I did so in part because I wasn't ready for adulthood," Vance wrote in his book. "I didn't know how to balance a checkbook, much less how to complete the financial aid forms for college."

By the time Vance was discharged, he said he could run three miles in 19 minutes and had learned how to compare banks, shop around for a loan and make wise financial decisions.

"It was the Marine Corps that first gave me an opportunity to truly fail, made me take that opportunity, and then, when I did fail, gave me another chance anyway," Vance wrote.

He spent his service working in public affairs, writing about Marines and taking photographs of their work, escorting civilian news reporters and speaking about happenings on base.

In Iraq, he embedded with different units to get a sense of their daily routines and wrote

a story about a crew keeping KC-130J tankers in the air. He also waded into unprotected Iraqi territory with a civil affairs unit to meet with locals.

"I was lucky to escape any real fighting," Vance wrote of his deployment.

In his last nine months in service, Vance said he unexpectedly became a media relations officer at Cherry Point — a position typically reserved for the most senior Marines. The job involved liaising with news media, considered the "holy grail" of Marine Corps public affairs with the "biggest audience and the highest stakes."

"The experience taught me a valuable lesson: That I could do it. I could work 20-hour days when I had to. I could speak clearly and confidently with TV cameras shoved in my face. I could stand in a room with majors, colonels, and generals and hold my own. I could do a captain's job even when I feared I couldn't," he wrote.

# Navy Reserve officer convicted in visa scheme

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — A Navy Reserve commander faces up to 45 years in prison after a federal jury convicted him of bribery and other charges related to fake recommendation letters he wrote for Afghans seeking visas to live in the United States.

Cmdr. Jeromy Pittmann, of Pensacola, Fla., was convicted Friday in New Hampshire of one charge of bribery and false writing, separate single charges of bribery and false writing, and conspiracy to commit money laundering to conceal the bribes after a four-day trial, court records show.

His sentencing is scheduled for Oct. 21. A federal judge will consider federal guidelines and other statutory factors before sentencing Pittmann, the Department of Justice said in a statement Friday.

Pittmann, a former civilian supervisory engineer at Naval Support Activity Naples, Italy, was charged in January 2022 with writing more than 20 false recommendation letters claiming he knew and supervised Special Immigrant Visa applicants in their roles as translators for the U.S. Army and NATO.

He also affirmed that the applicants were in danger because the Taliban considered them traitors, and he declared that they did not pose a threat to national security, according to court documents.

The letters were written from May 2018 to September 2022. The State Department learned about the allegations against Pittmann through a complaint made in September 2020, court documents show.

“Pittmann did not know the applicants and had no basis for recommending them” for the visas, the Justice Department said. “In

exchange, Pittmann received several thousands of dollars in bribes.”

To avoid detection, Pittmann received the money through an intermediary and wrote false invoices to make it appear he was being paid for legitimate work outside of his military service, according to the Justice Department statement.

In the indictment, investigators said Pittmann’s email account showed that he was contacted by an unidentified person in 2018 asking whether he could write recommendation letters. Subsequent emails discuss payments.

In one case, investigators alleged that Pittmann, a Seabee reservist for at least 20 years whose service included time in Afghanistan, received at least \$1,500 for three letters, according to court documents. He also received \$2,000 transferred to his bank ac-

count in July 2018 as payment for a fake invoice he created to hide the transaction, the indictment alleged.

Each year, Afghan citizens who served as translators or otherwise helped the U.S. military during the war that lasted from 2001 to 2021 are offered a limited number of Special Immigrant Visas by the State Department.

As American forces were pulling out of Afghanistan in August 2021, the collapse of the U.S.-backed government in Kabul triggered a frenzied exodus of people trying to flee the Taliban takeover.

However, the Special Immigrant Visa program was plagued by delays, lack of coordination and understaffing even before that time, the State Department Inspector General found in 2020. Some candidates had been waiting for years for approval when the Taliban regained power.

## Deployable voting machines are closer, but not for 2024

By JONATHAN SNYDER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Overseas troops could be using deployable electronic voting machines to cast their ballots as soon as next year, the president of a nonprofit election technology firm said this week.

“We now have a fully functional prototype and are a few weeks away from wrapping up our report to [the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency],” Ben Adida, executive director of VotingWorks and the technical lead on the project, said Monday.

VotingWorks unveiled an early-stage version of its deployable voting machine in February at the National Association of State Election Directors conference in Washington, D.C. The machine aims to allow service members

around the world, even at remote locations, to transmit a signed, encrypted digital ballot to their home precinct for tallying on Election Day.

Service members would use their Common Access Card, which has a built-in digital signature for authentication, to cast their vote on the machine.

Adida said the machines will not be ready for use in the upcoming presidential election in November, but the company is hopeful to deploy them next year.

“We are exploring possible opportunities for a pilot election in early-mid 2025,” he said.

The prototype was developed as part of a research project funded by DARPA to find methods to make voting easier for troops stationed away from their districts.

## China, Philippines establish hotline to stop sea clashes

*Associated Press*

MANILA, Philippines — A recently signed agreement will open a direct line of communication between the presidential offices of China and the Philippines to help prevent any new confrontation from spiraling out of control in the disputed South China Sea, according to highlights of the accord seen by The Associated Press on Tuesday.

China and the Philippines have created such emergency telephone hotlines at lower levels in the past to better manage disputes, particularly in two fiercely disputed shoals where the Philippines has accused Chinese forces of increasingly hostile actions and China says Philippine ships have en-

croached despite repeated warnings.

The territorial disputes, however, have persisted since last year, sparking fears of a larger armed conflict that could involve the United States, which has repeatedly warned that it’s obligated to defend the Philippines, a key Asian treaty ally, if Filipino forces come under attack in the disputed waters.

U.S. Gen. Charles “CQ” Brown Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, met Philippine military chief Gen. Romeo Brawner in Manila on Tuesday and discussed ways to further boost defense ties, enhance the militaries’ ability to operate jointly and ensure regional ability, the Philippine military said.

# Illinois dam fails as parts of Midwest hit with heavy rain

*Associated Press*

CHICAGO — Thunderstorms with heavy rains and tornadoes rattled the Chicago area and elsewhere in the Midwest, overtopping a dam Tuesday in southern Illinois, cutting power to hundreds of thousands, and even sending weather forecasters scrambling for safety. A woman in Indiana died after a tree fell onto a home.

Water overtopped a dam near Nashville, sending first responders to the flooded area to make sure everyone got out safely, officials said. There were no reports of injuries in the community of 3,000 southeast of St. Louis, but crews were sent to a home where a woman reported water up to her waist, said Alex Haglund, a spokesperson for the Washington County Emergency Management Agency.

Officials had earlier said about 300 people were in the evacuation zone near the Nash-

ville City Reservoir. The rest of the town was not in imminent danger of flooding from the dam break, but flash flooding on roads created worries about water rescues.

“Those are incredibly dangerous right now,” Haglund said. A shelter was set up at a church.

The National Weather Service said 5-7 inches of rain fell over an eight-hour period. Additional heavy rain was in the forecast. An 11-mile stretch of Interstate 64 in the Nashville area was closed because of flooding. As the storms swept through the Chicago area late Monday, employees at a suburban National Weather Service office had to pass coverage duties to a northern Michigan post for five minutes. The agency reported wind speeds in the region as high as 75 mph.

“We did have an area of rotating wall clouds. “And it kind of developed right near our office here in Romeoville, Illinois. ... We went and took cover. We have a storm shelter here.”

The weather service confirmed a tornado hit Des Moines, Iowa, as storms rolled through Monday afternoon and into the night. Police responded to calls about utility poles that snapped in two.

The storms then moved east into northern Illinois and the Chicago area, which saw tornado warnings and drenching rain.

Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport reported 81 flight cancellations as of Tuesday morning, and Midway International Airport reported eight cancellations.

The storms also cut power to thousands in Ohio and Pennsylvania and caused damage to property, trees and power lines. No injuries were reported.

# Border arrests lowest since 2021

*Associated Press*

SAN DIEGO — Arrests for illegally crossing the border from Mexico plunged 29% in June, the lowest month of Joe Biden’s presidency, according to figures released Monday that provide another window on the impact of a new rule to temporarily suspend asylum.

Arrests totaled 83,536 in June, down from 117,901 in May to mark the lowest tally since January 2021, U.S. Customs and Border Protection said.

A seven-day average of daily arrests fell more than half by the end of June from Biden’s announcement on June 4 that asylum processing would be halted when daily arrests reach 2,500, which they did immediately, said Troy Miller, acting Customs and Border Protection commissioner.

“Recent border security measures have made a meaningful impact on our ability to impose consequences for those crossing unlawfully,” Miller said.

Arrests had already fallen by more than half from a record high of 250,000 in December, largely a result of increased enforcement by Mexican authorities, according to U.S. officials.

Sharp declines registered across nationalities, including Mexicans, who have been most affected by the suspension of asylum, and Chinese people, who generally fly to Ecuador and travel to the U.S. border over land.

San Diego was the busiest of the Border Patrol’s nine sectors bordering Mexico by number of arrests, followed by Tucson, Ariz. More than 41,000 people entered legally through an on-line appointment app called CBP One in June.

# California first to ban schools’ notifying of child’s pronoun change

*AP/Report for America*

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California became the first U.S. state to bar school districts from requiring staff to notify parents of their child’s gender identification change under a law signed Monday by Gov. Gavin Newsom.

The law bans school rules requiring teachers and other staff to disclose a student’s gender identity or sexual orientation to any other person without the child’s permission.

Proponents of the legislation say it will help protect LGBTQ+ students who live in unwelcoming households.

But opponents say it will hin-

der schools’ ability to be more transparent with parents.

The legislation comes amid a nationwide debate over local school districts and the rights of parents and LGBTQ+ students.

“This law helps keep children safe while protecting the critical role of parents,” Brandon Richards, a spokesperson for Newsom, said in a statement. “It protects the child-parent relationship by preventing politicians and school staff from inappropriately intervening in family matters and attempting to control if, when, and how families have deeply personal conversations.”

The new law comes after sev-

eral school districts in California passed policies requiring that parents be notified if a child requests to change their gender identification.

That led to pushback by Democratic state officials, who say students have a right to privacy.

But Jonathan Zachreson, an advocate in California who supports the so-called parental notification policies, opposes the law and said telling parents about a student’s request to change their gender identification is “critical to the well-being of children and for maintaining that trust between schools and parents.”

# DOD, VA urged to improve mental support for troops

BY PHILLIP WALTER  
WELLMAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

Service members facing the stress of separating from the military need more help from the Pentagon and the Department of Veterans Affairs to access mental health care, a federal watchdog agency says in a new report.

Armed forces personnel are particularly vulnerable while transitioning to civilian life, the Government Accountability Office said Monday, noting that the rate of suicide is about 2.5 times higher among veterans in their first year of separation than among active-duty troops.

The report raises specific concerns over a Defense Department program designed to help service members during transitions, saying it could be doing a better job.

DOD automatically enrolls service members who received mental health care or traumatic brain injury care in the year prior to leaving the military into the inTransition program, which offers specialized coaching and connects participants to mental health services. Those directly enrolled accounted for 85% of all

participants in 2022, according to the most recent data available.

But the program doesn't reach out to these enrollees until two to three months after they leave, the GAO found.

"This delayed timing may leave a gap in assistance to mental health services during a vulnerable period," the report said.

Challenges with readjusting to family and social life, financial strains and a loss of sense of purpose are faced by some service members during this time, it added.

The program also was unable to connect with over 70% of its automatically enrolled service members in 2022, partly because it relied on reaching them by telephone rather than by email, text and other methods, according to the GAO.

Once service members leave the military, they have the choice of seeking health care through the VA or through DOD's Tricare program, if eligible.

Among the five recommendations in the report was one that DOD revise inTransition's enrollment criteria and outreach policy, and establish performance goals.

# Zelenskyy: Ukraine needs 25 Patriots and more F-16s

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine needs 25 Patriot air defense systems to fully defend its airspace and protect the entire country from Russian missile attacks, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Monday, adding that he also wants Western partners to send more F-16 warplanes than those already pledged.

In his first news conference since returning from a trip to the United States, Zelenskyy said he is ready to work with Donald Trump if he wins November's election. "I am not afraid" of that prospect, Zelenskyy said, adding he is convinced that most Republicans support Ukraine in its war with Russia.

Zelenskyy said on Sunday he was "appalled" by the attempt to assassinate Trump and wished him a speedy recovery.

Western support is crucial for Ukraine as it tries to beat back Russia's bigger and better-equipped invading army. Zelenskyy has proved talented at persuading friendly countries to provide ever more support, even if he doesn't always get what he wants immediately.

A six-month delay in military assistance from the U.S., the biggest single contributor to Ukraine, meant that Kyiv's forces "lost the initiative" on the front line, Zelenskyy said.

Since the U.S. aid resumed in April, Ukraine has been scrambling to block a Russian offensive in eastern areas.

Zelenskyy didn't say how many Patriot systems Ukraine currently possesses, though it is far fewer than the 25 he says his country needs as Russia has battered the national power grid.

The U.S. and other NATO allies promised last week to provide Ukraine with dozens of air defense systems in the coming months, including at least four Patriot systems.

F-16 warplanes pledged by Western countries are due to arrive in Ukraine in two waves: the first batch this summer, and the second by the end of the year, Zelenskyy said.

He acknowledged the deliveries won't, on their own, be a game-changer in the war, given that the Russian air force is far larger. Ukraine will need more warplanes, he said.

Commenting on other issues, Zelenskyy said:

■ Russia should be present at a second international gathering to discuss peace. Russia was absent from the first meeting. There is no date for a second gathering.

■ A Ukrainian government reshuffle is in the cards. "We are discussing various changes with some ministers," Zelenskyy said.

■ Efforts to mobilize more troops are going according to plan, though Ukraine doesn't have enough training grounds and 14 brigades haven't yet received promised Western weapons.

# Sen. Menendez of NJ found guilty in corruption trial

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez was convicted on Tuesday of all the counts he faced at his corruption trial, including accepting bribes of gold and cash from three New Jersey businessmen and acting as a foreign agent for the Egyptian govern-

ment.

The jury's verdict followed a nine-week trial in which prosecutors said the Democrat abused the power of his office to protect allies from criminal investigations and enrich associates, including his wife, through acts that included meeting with Egyptian intelli-

gence officials and helping that country access millions of dollars in U.S. military aid.

Menendez did not testify but insisted publicly he was only doing his job as the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

He said the hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash

found in his New Jersey home was legally earned, and that gold bars hidden there belonged to his wife.

The verdict, delivered at a federal courthouse in Manhattan, comes four months before Election Day and could doom his campaign for reelection as an independent candidate.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Smoking laptop prompts an evacuation on flight

**CA** SAN FRANCISCO — A smoking laptop in a passenger's bag prompted an evacuation on an American Airlines flight headed to Miami from San Francisco International Airport on Friday, according to the airline.

One person sustained minor injuries while exiting that required transport to a hospital, the airline said. Passengers evacuated via emergency slides and a jet bridge.

Two other passengers also reported minor injuries, according to the San Francisco Fire Department, which responded to the incident.

Crews reported the smoking laptop as passengers were boarding, the airline said.

Steve Kulm, a spokesperson with the Federal Aviation Administration, said the agency will investigate.

### Judge: Election system doesn't violate rights

**KS** TOPEKA — A federal judge has ruled that a Latino majority's voting rights aren't violated by the election system in the former Wild West town in Kansas that inspired the long-running television series "Gunsmoke."

U.S. District Judge Eric Melgren concluded that Dodge City's practice of electing all five of its city commissioners at large does not prevent candidates backed by Latino voters from holding office. He issued his decision in a lawsuit filed in 2022 by two Latino residents who argued that the system is discriminatory and violated both the U.S. Constitution and

the landmark 1965 federal Voting Rights Act.

The two residents, Miguel Coca and Alejandro Rangel-Lopez, argued that the city should be required to have each commissioner elected from a separate district. About 64% of the city's 27,000 residents are Latino, and it's possible that Latinos would be a majority of residents in three of five single-member districts.

### Dolphin mass stranding is largest in US history

**MA** CAPE COD — Rescuers who helped free more than a hundred dolphins from the Cape Cod shoreline say they've confirmed that the mass stranding that began June 28 was the largest involving dolphins in U.S. history.

There were two prior events on record in Hawaii and the Florida Keys where dolphin species were observed circling in shallow water, but the Cape Cod event marks the highest number of dolphins beached in a single stranding event, according to the International Fund for Animal Welfare, which helped lead the rescue.

A final review of data and aerial imagery last week revealed that a total of 146 dolphins were involved in the stranding, according to IFAW communications director Stacey Hedman.

### Officials argue against drawing new districts

**MS** JACKSON — Redrawing some Mississippi legislative districts in time for this November's election is impossible because of tight deadlines to prepare ballots, state officials say in new court papers.

Attorneys for the all-Republican state Board of Election Commissioners filed arguments in response to a July 2 ruling by three federal judges who ordered the Mississippi House and Senate to reconfigure some legislative districts. The judges said current districts dilute the power of Black voters in three parts of the state.

The ruling came in a lawsuit filed in 2022 by the Mississippi State Conference of the NAACP and several Black residents. The judges said they wanted new districts to be drawn before the next regular legislative session begins in January.

Legislative and congressional districts are updated after each census to reflect population changes from the previous decade. Mississippi's population is about 59% white and 38% Black.

In the legislative redistricting plan adopted in 2022 and used in the 2023 elections, 15 of the 52 Senate districts and 42 of the 122 House districts are majority-Black. Those are 29% of Senate districts and 34% of House districts.

### Health officials confirm four new bird flu cases

**CO** WELD COUNTY — Four poultry workers in Colorado have been diagnosed with bird flu, health officials confirmed Sunday.

The new cases bring the U.S. total to nine since the first human case of the current outbreak was detected in 2022, also in a Colorado poultry worker. Eight of the nine were reported this year.

Their illnesses were relatively mild — reddened and irritated eyes and common respiratory infection symptoms like fe-

ver, chills, coughing, sore throat and runny nose. None were hospitalized, officials said. The other cases have also been mild.

A fifth person with symptoms is undergoing testing, but those results are not back yet, officials said. The workers were culling poultry at a farm in northeast Colorado, according to state health officials. All had direct contact with infected birds.

### Green-boned dinosaur is set to be on display

**CA** LOS ANGELES — The latest dinosaur being mounted at the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles is not only a member of a new species — it's also the only one found on the planet whose bones are green, according to museum officials.

Named "Gnatie" (pronounced Natalie) for the gnats that swarmed during the excavation, the long-necked, long-tailed herbivorous dinosaur's fossils got its unique coloration, a dark mottled olive green, from the mineral celadonite during the fossilization process.

While fossils are typically brown from silica or black from iron minerals, green is rare because celadonite forms in volcanic or hydrothermal conditions that typically destroy buried bones.

The celadonite entered the fossils when volcanic activity around 50 million to 80 million years ago made it hot enough to replace a previous mineral.

The dinosaur lived 150 million years ago in the late Jurassic Era, making it older than Tyrannosaurus rex — which lived 66 million to 68 million years ago.

— From wire reports

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# Dodgers' Hernández wins Home Run Derby

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — When Teoscar Hernández needed a moment to calm down during Monday's Home Run Derby, the Los Angeles Dodgers slugger got a boost from a former teammate who just happened to be last year's champion.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr. wore a Blue Jays jersey with Hernández's name and No. 37 on the back as he watched the competition, honoring his friend from their time as Toronto teammates from 2017-22.

"That was a surprise of the night," Hernández said. "He brings my jersey from Toronto. And when he goes to home plate,

he was trying to calm (me) down, and so he had passed two times, and it works. He said he wanted to help me going into the last round."

Hernández won the Home Run Derby when he beat Bobby Witt Jr. of the Kansas City Royals 14-13 in the final round.

The 31-year-old Hernández hit 49 homers over three rounds that totaled 3.98 miles and became the first Dodgers player to win the derby among 11 who have tried. While not participating in the derby this year, Guerrero gave Hernández advice during breaks.

"If I have to bet, it doesn't matter who I'm going against, I'm going to bet on myself," Hernández

said when asked if he felt like the underdog. "People maybe underestimate myself."

Witt, needing one home run to tie with one out remaining, drove a ball to one of the deepest parts of Globe Life Field in left-center, where it hit halfway up the wall to the left of the 410-foot sign.

"When I hit it I knew I kind of — I didn't hit it great. But, yeah, I just was trying to blow on it or something," Witt said with a chuckle. "The first thing I thought was just no pop... We got to do a couple more curls or something."

Kansas City has never had a derby winner.

Both finished their two-minute

final round with 11 homers, before bonus swings were added. Witt came up short of his first two bonus swings, then hit two homers in a row — one a 457-foot drive that got him one more swing.

Witt was the No. 2 overall pick by the Royals in 2019 out of Colleyville Heritage High School, about 15 miles north of the Rangers' stadium. It was his first time in the derby, but he was the high school home run champion in Washington in 2018 — and is the only player to compete in both contests.

The 24-year-old Witt finished with 50 homers overall that traveled 3.8 miles.

## MLB batting average near 50-year low, velocity at all-time high

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Baseball can't run away from its lack of runs.

Batting averages are near half-century lows. Velocity is at an all-time high.

"Run scoring, it's not easy to do. It's hard and it's getting harder," Minnesota manager Rocco Baldelli said. "Pitchers are getting better by the outing."

The major league batting average was .240 through April and .239 in May, the lowest since the bottom of .237 in 1968's Year of the Pitcher. It's risen slightly along with the temperature as spring turned to summer: .246 in June and .250 in July, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Still, the season average of .243 heading into the All-Star break was just ahead of 2022 and 1968 as the lowest since the dead-ball era ended in 1920.

"Batting average was down a little bit. That's not necessarily a good thing if you're looking for action in the game," baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said in late May.

And the drop isn't just in the big leagues. This year's minor league batting average is .243, down from .256 in 2019.

"I didn't see 100 (mph) when I was playing. It's commonplace now," said Los Angeles Dodgers manager Dave Roberts, whose last season as a player was 2008.

Average four-seam fastball velocity is 94.2 mph this year, matching 2023 and up from 91.1 mph in 2008. There were 3,880 pitches of 100 mph or higher last year, up from 214 in 2008.

Just at Triple-A this year, there have been 461.

"You can tell as a hitter. Guys are going to the top with the fastballs," said Dylan Crews, the No. 2 draft pick last year and now at Washington's Triple-A Rochester farm team.

In an age of shortened attention spans, Major League Baseball has tried to increase action by instituting limits on defensive shifts in 2023 along with a pitch clock to cut dead time. The average time of a nine-inning game dropped from 3 hours, 4 minutes in 2022 to 2:40 last year and 2:36 thus far this season, but runs remain near post-Steroids Era lows: 4.39 per team each game, down from 4.62 last year but up from 4.28 in 2022.

Still, hitters have cut down slightly on strikeouts: the rate of 8.36 per team per game this season is the lowest since 2017, down from 8.61 last year and a record 8.81 in 2019.

"There's more spin rate. There's harder throwers," San Diego star third baseman Manny Machado said. "There's just so much information, and I think that's what creates the havoc and makes hitting a little bit harder."

The percentage of fastballs — four-seamers, sinkers and cutters — is 55.5% this year, just above last season's 55.4%. It was 62.5% in 2015.

Spin rates on sliders, sweepers and slurve have increased from 2,106 revolutions per minute in 2015 to 2,475 this year and their use has increased from 10.9% to 22.5%.

Team wonks view video and dissect data to provide pitchers pointers and batters blueprints. The Dodgers employ senior directors of baseball systems applications and baseball

systems platforms along with directors of baseball strategy and information, quantitative analysis, baseball product development, integrative baseball performance, performance innovation lab and baseball innovation.

As a result of the perpetual perusal, pitchers are told what to throw, when to throw and how to throw.

Atlanta's Max Fried mixes seven pitches: four-seamer, sinker, cutter, slider, sweeper, curveball and changeup.

"The information is so prevalent that there are no secrets," Fried said. "Baseball is still a game of changing speeds and mixing up looks and if you can just kind of keep guys off balance as much as you possibly can there, you're going to give yourself the best chance to be successful."

The New York Yankees built a pitching laboratory known as the "Gas Station" at their minor league complex in Tampa, Fla., ahead of the 2020 season, a type of facility that is now becoming more commonplace. Pitchers from big leaguers down to high school have gone to Driveline in Kent, Wash., to develop their repertoires. "Pitch shape" has become a common term.

"You could go long periods, months maybe, where teams were not adding new pitches," Baldelli said. "And now you see almost every series, you run in against a team and someone's doing something completely different. I think the fear has kind of left the major league clubhouses when it comes to making adjustments."

# Harman begins defense of British Open title

Associated Press

TROON, Scotland — Of all the recent traditions in the Royal & Ancient game, what Brian Harman took part in on Monday afternoon might be the least enjoyable: returning the claret jug.

The formal handover of the British Open trophy required a little pomp. Harman was in the back seat of an SUV. The destination was not much longer than the 40-foot birdie putt he made last year on the 14th hole on his way to winning the Open. But he had to wait for the film crew to be set, for the traffic on the road to clear.

“It’s all yours,” Harman told Martin Slumbers, the R&A CEO who took back golf’s oldest trophy that apparently has seen its share of the finest wine and bourbon in the year since Harman won at Royal Liverpool.

Harman is a straight shooter — with a rifle, with his mouth and last year with his putter — but a staged moment as this didn’t bother him.

“In my opinion, it’s the coolest

trophy in all of sports,” Harman said. “So I think it’s deserving of all of the pageantry that’s involved with it.”

Getting it back by the end of the week is the real challenge.

The homecoming of the claret jug was an unofficial way to launch the start of the final men’s major of the year. The 152nd Open Championship begins Thursday on the Scottish links along the Firth of Clyde on the Irish Sea.

Royal Troon is renowned for its pot bunkers that are so deep they effectively serve as a one-shot penalty when tee shots find them on the longer holes. The outward holes are shorter with the prevailing wind, the inward holes are longer and into the wind.

“You have to take them on,” Scottie Scheffler said.

Harman had gone six years without a win until putting together a masterpiece last year to lead over the final 51 holes and win by six. He hasn’t won since

then, a matter of getting his putter to cooperate. He hopes that’s the case this week.

“You can work and work and work. You just never know when that work is going to pay off,” Harman said. “You never know when the peak is coming. You never know when you’re going to catch a little bit of momentum. So you just have to hope it’s a big week.”

No one has won back to back in the British Open since Pádraig Harrington in 2007 (Carnoustie) and 2008 (Royal Birkdale). Go back to 1960 and the list of repeat winners includes only Tiger Woods, Tom Watson, Lee Trevino and Arnold Palmer.

“A little sad to give it back, but I’ll remember everywhere it’s been forever,” Harman said. “I’m happy to give it back, happy to be here. Ready to get going.”

Royal Troon is green and lush, and the rough is particularly thick at the base of turf. This isn’t likely to be a bright and sunny week along the Ayrshire coast,

and the links have been busy.

Woods arrived Sunday and went 18 holes, spending much of his time chipping and putting. His son Charlie is not with him, instead at home preparing for the U.S. Junior Amateur next week outside Detroit.

After handing off the jug, Harman headed out to see Royal Troon for the first time. Monday was largely a day of reflection and he was eager to move forward.

But it was a good year, even without another win. He took the jug to Georgia Bulldogs football and Atlanta Braves baseball games. He took it everywhere he could, a reminder of reaching the pinnacle of his sport.

“You never know how it’s going to go, but just the reception from everyone back home was overwhelming, just how excited everyone was,” he said. “I was obviously very excited, but to be able to share that excitement with people that I care about was probably the best.”

## US men’s basketball builds big lead, holds off Australia

Associated Press

There was a lot for the U.S. Olympic team to like Monday. And a lot not to like.

Anthony Davis scored 17 points and grabbed 14 rebounds, Tyrese Haliburton came up with a pair of late 3-pointers that helped stop a freefall by the Americans, and the United States beat Australia 98-92 on Monday to improve to 2-0 in its five-game slate of exhibitions leading into the Paris Olympics.

Devin Booker scored 16 for the U.S., Anthony Edwards scored 14 and three players — LeBron James, Bam Adebayo and Joel Embiid — finished with 10 for the Americans, who are playing host to a pair of exhibitions at Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, this week. They’ll play Serbia there Wednesday.

Jock Landale scored 20 for Australia, which got 17 from Josh Giddey and 14 from Dyson Daniels.

The U.S. led by 24 midway through the third quarter, yet saw that lead cut to six with 5:05 left after Australia went on a 39-21 run.

But Haliburton had the next six points on his 3s, pushing the lead back to 92-80.

Australia cut it to four on two separate occasions, but Booker went 4-for-4 from the line in the final 8 seconds to ensure the U.S. would escape.

“Third quarter, we started turning the ball over,” U.S. coach Steve Kerr said. “We gave up a ton of points at the basket. Back cuts, offensive boards and so, the game shifted. It’s a good lesson for us. Better to learn that lesson now than later. And this will be a good tape for us to watch. But I give Australia a ton of credit. They were great. They fought. They were really physical. Took it to us in the last quarter and a half and really made it a game.”

Just like in the Canada game, the so-called second unit — Haliburton, Jrue Holiday, Adebayo, Davis and Booker — changed the game.

That was the group on the floor when the Americans took a game that was tied at 19-19 with 3:15 left in the first and turned it into a 39-23 lead — a 20-4 run in a span of just over 5 minutes.

Kerr used that group as his starting five to open the second half. But it’s become a clear trend already: when the U.S. goes to its bench and can replace All-Stars with other All-Stars, it’s just going to be a massive problem for opponents who don’t have anywhere near that same level of depth.

“The strength of our team is our depth, and we have to utilize our depth,” Kerr said.

The biggest weakness for the U.S. team so far, however, has been turnovers.

FIBA games are shorter than NBA games, 40 minutes instead of 48 minutes. That means there are fewer possessions and makes it even more imperative to not give the ball away.

Which the Americans did. A lot.

After committing 15 turnovers in last week’s exhibition win over Canada, the U.S. had 18 giveaways on Monday and Australia used them to fuel the comeback effort — getting 25 points off turnovers in the second half alone.

“Our turnovers, it’s all about focus and execution,” Davis said.

# Camps get underway as NFL rookies report

Associated Press

The short summer vacation is over for NFL players. It's time to begin the journey to Super Bowl 59.

Coming off a disappointing finish in the AFC championship game, the Baltimore Ravens became the first team to open training camp when they welcomed rookies Saturday. Nineteen more teams get underway this week and all 32 clubs will open doors by July 24.

Everyone is 0-0, but expectations aren't the same. Some teams are legitimate contenders. A few are rebuilding.

Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs are aiming to become the first team to threepeat since the 1965-67 Green Bay Packers won three consecutive NFL championships.

Eight teams have new head coaches. Several star quarterbacks changed teams.

While 20 teams begin camp this week for rookies, most veterans don't report until next week. Only the Ravens, Chiefs, Chicago Bears and Houston Texans will have their full teams in camp this week. The defending AFC South champion Texans are first to open doors to vets Wednesday.

The Texans and Bears will kick off the exhibition season in the Hall of Fame game Aug. 1 in Canton, Ohio.

The Chiefs will host the Rav-

ens in a rematch of the AFC title game to start the regular season Sept. 5.

## New head coaches

Jim Harbaugh is back in the NFL with the Los Angeles Chargers after leading Michigan to a national championship. Dan Quinn took over for the Washington Commanders, getting his second head coach opportunity. Raheem Morris also is a second-time head coach, taking the job with the Atlanta Falcons.

Dave Canales (Carolina Panthers), Mike Macdonald (Seattle Seahawks) and Brian Callahan (Tennessee Titans) are first-timers after successful stints as coordinators.

Antonio Pierce was promoted from interim coach in Las Vegas after leading the Raiders to a 5-4 record in the second half of last season.

Jerod Mayo has the biggest shoes to fill, replacing six-time Super Bowl champion Bill Belichick with the New England Patriots.

## Teams with new QBs

Kirk Cousins joined the Falcons in one of the early surprises in free agency. Atlanta then pulled off a bigger shocker, selecting QB Michael Penix with the No. 8 pick in the draft after giving Cousins \$100 million guaranteed.

Russell Wilson will try to revive his career in Pittsburgh where he'll enter camp as the starter, but the Steelers also acquired Justin Fields just in case.

The Bears drafted Caleb Williams at No. 1 overall and the Commanders took Heisman Trophy winner Jayden Daniels second. Both are likely starting Week 1. The Patriots selected Drake Maye third, but he could start the season backing up veteran Jacoby Brissett.

Sam Darnold replaces Cousins in Minnesota only to keep the seat warm for rookie J.J. McCarthy.

Veteran Gardner Minshew will compete with second-year pro Aidan O'Connell for the starting spot in Las Vegas.

Rookie Bo Nix will battle Jarrett Stidham for the job in Denver. The Broncos also added Zach Wilson.

## Top camp storylines

Keep an eye on potential holdouts.

Cowboys All-Pro wide receiver CeeDee Lamb missed mandatory minicamp and may not report to camp because he wants a new contract. Several of Lamb's peers got paid this offseason, and he's next.

Justin Jefferson set the market for elite receivers, getting a four-year, \$140 million contract extension that included \$110 million in guaranteed money. A.J. Brown,

Amon-Ra St. Brown, Jaylen Waddle and DeVonta Smith also received new deals.

The Cowboys could have salary cap issues. QB Dak Prescott enters the final season of a four-year, \$160 million contract and star edge rusher Micah Parsons is due for a new deal soon.

Edge rusher Haason Reddick was traded from Philadelphia to the Jets because he wants a new contract. New York didn't give him one, so he didn't report for offseason workouts.

The Dolphins and QB Tua Tagovailoa are talking about a new contract as he enters the season on the final year of his rookie deal.

His teammate, Tyreek Hill, has already stated he wants a revamped deal after losing his status as the highest-paid wideout.

Aaron Rodgers is returning to the New York Jets after his first season with the team lasted just four plays because of a torn Achilles tendon. Rodgers, who skipped mandatory minicamp but attended OTAs, has been throwing since the end of last season and should be ready to go.

## Roster cuts

Teams can carry a maximum of 90 players throughout training camp and for all of their preseason games. Rosters must be trimmed to 53 by 4 p.m. EDT on Aug. 27.

# Georgia football still grappling with driving violations

Associated Press

DALLAS — Georgia players who have been arrested or cited for driving violations have been disciplined with suspensions and fines through the collective that provides name, image and likeness payments to the school's athletes, coach Kirby Smart said Tuesday.

Football players at the school have been involved in 24 driving-related violations (DUI, reckless driving or

speeding), The Atlanta-Journal Constitution reported, including a crash that killed a player and a recruiting staffer in January 2023.

"I'll be the first to admit we haven't solved that issue," Smart told a group of reporters before he took the stage at SEC Media Days.

Georgia offensive lineman Devin Willock and recruiting analyst Chandler LeCroy were killed in a car crash in

Jan. 15, 2023, just days after the Bulldogs won the national title game.

Last week, Georgia linebacker Smael Mondon Jr. was arrested for reckless driving and defensive back Demello Jones was cited for street racing in Athens, Ga.

"The incidents that have been happening off the field are not something we condone," Smart said. "It's very unfortunate, 'disappointing' I

guess is the best word. I always talk about processing outcomes in wins and losses. We try not to base things on outcomes. In this case, the outcomes are very disappointing."

Georgia announced Tuesday that safety David Daniel-Sisavanh has been dismissed from the team. The senior was charged with reckless driving in Atlanta in February after leading police on a pursuit.