

Legislators plan better military child care

BY SARAH CAMMARATA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers are teeing up legislative proposals that would tackle child care problems in the military, as thousands of children remain on monthslong waitlists and the Defense Department's backlog to repair existing facilities swells.

The Defense Department, along with experts and military advocacy groups, have recognized high-quality child care as a retention and readiness issue for service members. The coronavirus pandemic also has exacerbated the problem, as some child care centers and schools remain shuttered, blocking access to after-school care too.

The inability to access affordable and quality child care can impact a service member's ability to report for duty and his or her decision to stay in the military, and it also can be a barrier to spouse unemployment and hurts the overall well-being of military families, experts said.

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., said she will introduce a proposal in mid-May with Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., that requires the Defense Department to conduct a review on its child care centers, including examining their conditions, establishing a plan to modernize them and finding ways to expand capacity.

"There has been a lack of

recognition that when a service member serves, so does his or her family. ... We're elevating this issue, and we're going to get everyone's attention and we're going to get them to respond," said Speier, chairwoman of the military personnel subpanel of the House Armed Services Committee.

A Defense Department report in June 2020 on its child development programs found out of 761 child development centers, 378 are in "good" condition, while 135 are in "poor" or "failing" condition due to the high cost of repairs and deferred maintenance.

Child care is also a focus for Rep. Sara Jacobs, D-Calif., who is working with Speier and oth-

er lawmakers on child care amendments in the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, which sets funding levels for the Pentagon.

Jacobs represents San Diego, a region with the DOD's largest concentrations of child care needs, according to the department.

Of the nearly 9,000 children of service members worldwide who are stuck on a waitlist despite immediate need for child care, 1,888 of those children are in San Diego, making up the largest segment on the waitlist. Norfolk, Va., and the National Capital region are close behind at 1,761 and 1,491, respectively, according to the department.

Pararescueman helped save 6 amid cache blasts

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

A series of blasts in a cache of seized Taliban rocket-propelled grenades threw three Green Berets several feet, and then the gear they were wearing began to burn, setting off ammunition in rifle magazines.

Special Forces soldiers were sifting through a munitions cache seized in a school Taliban militants had used as a base, when suddenly a blast ripped through the stockpile and hurled the soldiers several feet.

The flames then ignited some of the Green Berets' gear and set off ammunition in their rifle magazines.

"The first thing that comes to mind is fire," said Staff Sgt. Michael Rogers, a pararescueman who treated seven people wounded in the 2019 blast, later found to be the result of a partner force member's negligent weapon discharge. "There were so many things covered in fuel and burning. It looked apocalyptic."

Rogers, now with the 57th Rescue Squadron at Aviano Air Base in Italy, is scheduled to receive the 2021 Air Force Sergeants Association William H. Pitsenbarger Heroism

Award in July for his treatment of the wounded. The award is named for a pararescueman who earned the Medal of Honor for aiding soldiers during a Vietnam firefight in 1966.

Rogers' experience as a mountain guide and paramedic in Wyoming suited him well when he joined the Air Force in October 2014, weeks after his honeymoon. He completed the pararescue program in 18 months, though it normally takes three years, and deployed to Afghanistan in 2017, the Air Force said in a statement last week.

On his second deployment in 2019, he was working alongside a Special Forces unit that was supporting Afghan forces in an area under a concentrated Taliban attack.

"We were just trying to focus on a few districts that were holes for drugs and equipment, and prevent that from continuing to worsen," he said in the statement.

Locals told them a school nearby was a Taliban headquarters, and it was there the U.S. and Afghan forces found "piles and piles of radio equipment and different kinds of electronics, Taliban propaganda and about 50 to 60 pounds of homemade explosives," along with ammunition, mortars and "stacks of

rocket boosters," Rogers said.

A few team members sorted through it all after asking Rogers and others to leave, likely saving their lives.

"All of a sudden we saw a flash and heard two bangs," he said. "We then felt the concussive force from the explosion and immediately thought we were under attack, so we prepared to fire back."

After realizing it wasn't an ambush, Rogers began mass casualty procedures with the Green Beret team's medic.

Rogers coordinated an evacuation and treated six other teammates. It took more than an hour for the medevac to arrive and take them to a German surgical center.

Later that night, the Special Forces soldier died. Rogers stayed by his side through the night as his team came to pay their respects.

The Air Force statement did not name the Green Beret who died and officials at Aviano Air Base, where Rogers serves, could not provide further information. But the description of events fits details the military has released about the death of Sgt. 1st Class Michael Goble, 33, in Kunduz province on Dec. 23, 2019.

Transgender troops cheer reversal of ban

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Maj. Alivia Stehlik's fears that transgender soldiers would be kicked out of the Army faded Friday as former President Donald Trump's regulations were overturned. Those who meet military standards are once again allowed to enlist and serve openly.

But the policy change — announced in March by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and taking effect Friday — won't erase Stehlik's memories of how she said she felt while serving as a transgender woman in Afghanistan in 2018 when the White House initiated moves to bar most transgender people from serving.

Trump argued on Twitter that transgender service members' medical costs were a drain on the military and said they would no longer be allowed to serve "in any capacity."

But those who worked with Stehlik in Afghanistan said her service was proof that wasn't true.

"Nobody can argue with her that a trans person can't deploy and effectively do their job in theater, because she literally just did it," said physical therapy tech Staff Sgt. Logan Haller, Stehlik's enlisted partner on her 2018-2019

deployment to Afghanistan.

Senior U.S. lawmakers agreed, with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi saying when the Trump ban took effect in March last year: "No one with the strength and bravery to serve in the U.S. military should be turned away because of who they are."

Stehlik, a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and Army Ranger School who served as an infantry officer, fought against the ban. She advocated for the military to go back to the policy endorsed by then-President Barack Obama in 2016, which lifted a nearly 60-year prohibition on transgender service members serving openly.

"Being trans should never be a thing that limits anyone," Stehlik told Stars and Stripes in a Facebook messenger call from Fort Carson in Colorado Springs, Colo., where she is now based.

Stehlik started transitioning in 2016 and began hormone replacement therapy the following year. She came out publicly in May 2017 and a few months later, she volunteered to deploy to Afghanistan as a physical therapist with the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division.

She worried about being accepted by her new unit, she said.

Haller admitted he had his doubts about whether transgender soldiers would be able to balance their medical needs with deployment to a combat zone.

"One of the big questions that a lot of people had about the whole issue of trans service members was, 'Are they deployable?'" Haller said. "That was one of the questions I had, too, like, on a personal level ... How much sense does that make for the military, and how do we reconcile that with what the Army needs?"

During her deployment to Afghanistan, Stehlik treated about 1,700 troops for injuries. While most of them welcomed her ability to heal them, reduce pain and prevent them from being sent back home, some objected to her being transgender, said Capt. Sara Skiles, an Army social worker deployed to Afghanistan at the same time as Stehlik who traveled with her to bases around the country.

Early in Stehlik's deployment, for example, some soldiers at Camp Dahlke, about 60 miles south of Kabul, didn't want to be touched by a transgender physical therapist, Spc. Steven Scott said.

"There were some soldiers who were apprehensive," said Scott, whose job in an artillery

battery included hefting heavy shells, which led to back issues. "Artillery just introduced females a few years ago. So there's a lot of people in artillery who are not used to working with females, let alone transgender."

But after Stehlik successfully reduced Scott's chronic back pain, word of her therapy skills spread. The next time she visited the base, soldiers were lined up, waiting for her to treat them, Scott said.

"She's willing to step up and do the right thing, even when it's difficult," Haller said. "And part of that is treating the people who are maybe a little sketched out by her being trans, or the people who maybe disagree with how she lives her life. She's still like, 'I'm here to be a good human and take care of you and do what I can to make you better.'"

The number of service members who identify as transgender ranges from 1,000 to 8,000, the director of military accession policy at the Pentagon, Stephanie Miller, told reporters in March.

A 2016 Rand Corp. report said the estimated 2,450 transgender personnel on active duty would minimally affect military readiness because only a tiny percentage would access transition-related health care each year.

US sends military transport planes with supplies to India

New York Daily News

The U.S. has sent a number of large military transport planes loaded with supplies, including desperately needed oxygen, to India for its lethal battle against COVID-19, a top security official said Sunday.

India is home to more than a third of the world's new COVID-19 cases, according to U.S. officials, and that grim tally soared to a new peak Saturday, with 401,993 cases recorded after

a 10-day stretch of more than 300,000 daily cases.

Overwhelmed hospitals are turning away sick patients, with supplies of oxygen and medicine running low, and skies are smoke-filled from crematoriums working around the clock to burn the bodies of victims.

The U.S. has sent India multiple military plane loads of supplies, including oxygen, medicine and raw materials for vaccines, national security adviser Jake

Sullivan said on ABC News' "This Week With George Stephanopoulos."

The U.S. also is scouring global sources for more supplies and enlisting international partners in the effort, he said.

"We're proud of what we've done so far," Sullivan said. "In a crisis of this speed and ferocity, we always wish we could move faster and do more."

Experts caution that an outbreak as big as India's raises the

threat of more variants and the fear they could be resistant to current vaccines.

The U.S. is restricting travel from India as of Tuesday, banning most non-U.S. citizens from entering the country.

India, a nation of more than 1.3 billion people caught in a second wave of the pandemic, has had more than 215,000 COVID-19 deaths, according to the Johns Hopkins University & Medicine Coronavirus Resource Center.

US Huey lands on Tokyo golf course helipad

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

TAMA HILLS RECREATION AREA, Japan — Golf balls whizzed harmlessly below a UH-1N Iroquois on Saturday as the helicopter circled over a golf course used by the U.S. military in western Tokyo.

The Huey, from the 459th Airlift Squadron out of nearby Yokota Air Base, touched down on a giant white “H” beside a driving range. The emergency landing zone test marked the first time an aircraft had landed there in four decades, according to the Air Force.

A crowd of curious golfers watched from a parking lot and then posed for photographs as the aircraft idled on the pad.

“The reason we came down here was to showcase the landing zone here at Tama Hills,” Tech. Sgt. Alexandra Vidato, a flight engineer, said after exiting the Huey. “We would use it for any sort of emergency for Yokota or the local community.”

The Air Force dubbed the golf course landing “Operation Tamadachi” — a play on Operation Tomodachi, the humanitarian response involving 24,000 U.S. troops to the earthquake and tsunami that struck northeast Japan on March 11, 2011.

The Tama Hills landing zone, about 18 miles west of Tokyo’s Shinjuku ward, hasn’t been used in about 40 years, Vidato said.

Yokota’s Hueys typically fly to places such as Hardy Barracks — Stars and Stripes’ Pacific headquarters in Tokyo’s Roppongi district — as well as Naval Air Facility Atsugi and Camp Zama, home to U.S. Army Japan in Kanagawa prefecture.

Their mission includes air medevac, air ambulance, search and rescue and operational support airlift.

The Tama helipad is close to a residential neighborhood next to the golf course.

“It’s a fairly tight LZ,” Vidato said. “We call it a restricted landing zone.”

A passenger on the helicopter, Tama’s head golf professional, Patrick Bowman, had a bird’s eye view of the course on his way to work.

“We don’t expect this to be an every day thing,” he said after clambering out of the Huey.

Tama Hills is revitalizing its infrastructure, which included repainting the helipad, Bowman said.

Paratrooper faces charges from deadly Syria gunfight

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

An 82nd Airborne Division soldier is facing charges stemming from a deadly fire-fight in Syria between U.S. forces and those backing the regime of President Bashar Assad.

Sgt. 1st Class Robert Nicoson, the platoon sergeant on a patrol that came under fire in August near the northeastern Syrian town of Qamishli, faces an Article 32 hearing later this month, similar to a civilian grand jury proceeding, to review evidence against him on several charges related to that and at least one earlier incident.

The charges include two counts of failure to obey an order or regulation, two counts of reckless endangerment, one count of communicating threats and three counts of obstructing justice, division spokesman Lt. Col. Mike Burns said last week after Army Times reported on the case.

The gunbattle broke out on what the U.S.-led coalition described at the time as a routine anti-Islamic State patrol, one of several altercations last year between U.S. military patrols and pro-regime Syrian forces or their Russian backers in the civil war that began in 2011.

The Americans had received “safe passage” from Syrian forces but took fire as

they passed, the U.S.-led Operation Inherent Resolve said in a statement at the time. Coalition ground forces returned fire but supporting aircraft overhead didn’t strike.

A Syrian fighter was killed and two others were wounded in the incident. There were no coalition casualties.

Nicoson had been under consideration for a Bronze Star with valor device for his actions during the firefight, said Phillip Stackhouse, his civilian attorney.

The military alleges that Nicoson put the platoon at risk by going somewhere they shouldn’t have been and then threatening Syrian forces before the fighting broke out. They do not allege misconduct during the actual gunbattle or say that Nicoson started it, Stackhouse said.

The patrol was supposed to keep its distance from regime forces, but somehow ended up at the checkpoint, he said. Their movements were being reported to higher authorities and Nicoson was in a vehicle at the rear, Stackhouse said, “and yet they want to hold him accountable for coming within 2 kilometers of a checkpoint.”

The platoon commander, who was in a vehicle nearer the front of the column, received a general officer memorandum of reprimand, Stackhouse said, but he is not facing charges like his client.

Navy, Marine exchanges on Guam open to some civilian employees

BY DANIEL BETANCOURT
Stars and Stripes

Some civilians working for the Defense Department and Coast Guard on Guam may now shop at Navy and Marine Corps exchanges, thanks to a DOD order issued last month.

As of Saturday, non-appropriated and appropriated fund employees have privileges at the Navy and Marine Corps exchanges at installations in the U.S. and its territories and possessions, according to a Navy news release. The exchanges are also gearing up to provide online shopping access by mid-October to the same employees as well as retirees.

“The expansion to new authorized shoppers is expected to increase the contribu-

tion to quality-of-life programs and greatly benefit the entire military community,” the release said.

To shop at the exchanges, eligible customers need only present a valid common access card at the door or to the cashier, according to the release. Eligible shoppers without the card may show proof of employment document dated within 12 months and a valid photo ID.

The new privilege does not apply to purchases of alcohol, tobacco or military uniforms and does not apply to DOD contractors, the release said. Base commanders have discretion to revoke the new privilege if the expanded customer base creates too much demand for installations to handle.

Overcrowded boat capsizes off San Diego

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — A packed boat being used in a suspected human smuggling operation capsized Sunday and broke apart in powerful surf along the rocky San Diego coast, killing three people and injuring more than two dozen others, authorities said.

Lifeguards, the U.S. Coast Guard and other agencies responded around 10:30 a.m. following reports of an overturned vessel in the waves near the rugged peninsula of Point Loma, according to the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department.

The original call was for a handful of people overboard, but as rescuers arrived in boats and jet skis, they quickly real-

ized “it was going to be a bigger situation with more people,” said San Diego Lifeguard Services Lt. Rick Romero.

“There are people in the water, drowning, getting sucked out the rip current there,” he said.

Seven people were pulled from the waves, including three who drowned, said Romero. One person was rescued from a cliff and 22 others managed to make it to shore on their own, he said.

“Once we arrived on scene, the boat had basically been broken apart,” Romero said. “Conditions were pretty rough: 5 to 6 feet of surf, windy, cold.”

A total of 27 people were transported to hospitals with “a

wide variety of injuries” including hypothermia, Romero said. Most of the victims were able to walk themselves to ambulances, he said.

Officials said the group was overcrowded on a 40-foot cabin cruiser that is larger than the typical open-top wooden pangastyle boats often used by smugglers to bring people illegally into the United States from Mexico.

“Every indication from our perspective was this was a smuggling vessel. We haven’t confirmed their nationality,” said Jeff Stephenson, a supervising agent with U.S. Border Patrol.

Under a pandemic-related order in effect since March

2020, migrants from Mexico and people from Central American countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras picked up at the border are immediately expelled to Mexico without an opportunity to seek asylum. President Joe Biden has exempted unaccompanied children from expulsions but the vast majority of adults are quickly sent back without facing any consequences.

Border Patrol agents went to hospitals to interview survivors of the capsizing, including the boat’s captain, who Stephenson described as a “suspected smuggler.” Smugglers typically face federal charges, and those being smuggled are usually deported.

EU could reopen external borders

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — In an announcement sure to be welcomed by travelers worldwide, EU officials Monday proposed easing restrictions on visiting the 27-nation bloc as vaccination campaigns across the continent gather speed.

Travel to the European Union is currently extremely limited except for a handful of countries with low infection rates. But with the summer tourist season looming, the European Commission hopes the new recommendations will dramatically expand that list.

“The Commission proposes to allow entry to the EU for nonessential reasons not only for all persons coming from countries with a good epidemiological situation, but also all people who have received the last recommended dose of an EU-authorized vaccine,” it said.

Coronavirus vaccines authorized by the European Medicines Agency, the bloc’s drug regulator, include Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson. The EMA has not approved any vaccines from Russia or China as of yet, but is looking at data for Russia’s Sputnik V jab.

EU officials believe the bloc’s COVID-19 vaccination campaign will soon be “a game changer” in the fight against the deadly virus. Its proposal will be dis-

cussed with EU ambassadors this week and the Commission hopes it could enter into force by June.

EU nations could also individually decide to accept travelers immunized with vaccines listed by WHO for emergency use. The U.N. health agency has approved the same four vaccines as the EMA, and is expected to make a ruling soon on China’s Sinopharm vaccine.

Commission spokesman Adalbert Jahnz said fully-vaccinated travelers coming from outside the EU should be allowed to visit Europe, but insisted that the proposal’s goal is not to exempt them from testing or quarantines upon arrival.

“This still remains very much in the hands of the member states,” he said.

The Commission also proposed raising the threshold of new COVID-19 cases that is used to determine the countries from which all travel should be permitted.

“Nonessential travel regardless of individual vaccination status is currently permitted from seven countries with a good epidemiological situation,” it said, proposing to increase 14-day cumulative COVID-19 infection rate per 100,000 inhabitants from 25 to 100.

“This remains considerably below the current EU average, which is over 420,” it said.

US officials in Mideast assure allies over Iran

Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates — Top Biden administration officials and U.S. senators crisscrossed the Middle East on Monday, seeking to assuage growing unease among Gulf Arab partners over America’s re-engagement with Iran and other policy shifts in the region.

The trips come as the United States and Iran, through intermediaries in Vienna, discuss a return to Tehran’s tattered 2015 nuclear deal with world powers that former President Donald Trump abandoned three years ago.

Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., a key Biden ally dispatched on overseas diplomatic missions, told reporters in the UAE’s capital of Abu Dhabi that he hoped to allay the sheikhdom’s “understandable and legitimate concerns” about the return to the landmark deal and to create “broader engagement” with Gulf partners.

Coons said “close consultation” with the UAE about the ongoing talks in Vienna was “important, expected and happening,” adding that he hopes the Emiratis “may not just be notified, but actually help.”

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man facing hate crimes for synagogue vandalism

NY NEW YORK — A 29-year-old man faces hate crime charges for allegedly vandalizing several synagogues last week in the Bronx, New York City police said.

Jordan Burnette was arrested after being stopped by police for riding a bicycle against the flow of traffic, Deputy Inspector Jessica Corey, commanding officer of the Hate Crimes Task Force, said at a news conference.

Surveillance video from the area allegedly showed Burnette had thrown a rock through the windshield of a van and was in a synagogue parking lot where religious prayer books were found strewn on the ground.

Police said Burnette was riding a bicycle taken from a shed in the parking lot at the time he was stopped. He is suspected of shattering the windows of four synagogues last week.

Police: 4 arrested after drug deal on boardwalk

MD OCEAN CITY — Four Maryland men were arrested after police said they observed a drug deal on the Ocean City Boardwalk.

Ocean City Police said that they received a call from a boardwalk business owner who said he saw the occupants of a parked car on 8th Street measuring a white powder on a digital scale.

Undercover officers responded and police said they observed a drug transaction on the boardwalk. Police said the men engaged in the transaction got into two cars and drove off before being stopped.

Four men from Prince George's County were arrested on multiple charges. Police said they seized black tar heroin, powder cocaine, a digital scale, cash and a 9 mm handgun.

Woman surrenders dead dog, charged with neglect

IA ANKENY — An Iowa woman has been charged with animal neglect after bringing a dead dog and a starving puppy to an animal shelter.

Amber Jane Robinson, 39, of Ankeny was charged after she brought both dogs to the Animal Rescue League of Iowa on April 24, according to the Des Moines Register.

The complaint against Robinson said the dead black Labrador was extremely skinny and covered in its own waste when it was brought to the shelter. A 9-month-old German Shepherd puppy she also brought in was extremely dehydrated, and its ribs and spine protruded prominently from its body.

The complaint said a veterinarian technician estimated that the dead dog would have had to have been left unattended for three to four weeks to reach the state it was in, and officials said it died of starvation. The puppy needed immediate medical attention.

'Zombie Terminator' ammo seized at port

DE WILMINGTON — Federal agents seized 40 rounds of "Zombie Terminator" ammunition from a Delaware port, preventing its shipment to Honduras.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection said that the rounds

were discovered during an X-ray examination of household goods in a shipping container at the Port of Wilmington.

It is illegal to export ammunition without a federal license.

Customs and Border Protection said the box of .38-caliber ammunition was tagged as "the best self-defense ammo during a zombie apocalypse."

Almost \$11,000 of stolen store merchandise found

MS COVINGTON COUNTY — Law enforcement in a Mississippi county said they found around \$11,000 worth of stolen Dollar General merchandise hidden in a shed and truck at someone's home.

Covington County Sheriff Darrell Perkins told WLBT-TV his deputies were working with an investigator who was hired by Dollar General after a string of recent thefts.

Perkins said that Dollar General officials believed a delivery driver was taking merchandise out of trucks and keeping it, according to WLBT.

Their investigation led them to a home in the northeast part of the county. A storage shed and truck contained nearly \$11,000 of stolen goods.

Helicopter to drop rabies vaccines over Cape Cod

MA BOURNE — A helicopter is dropping oral rabies vaccine baits intended for raccoons and other wildlife over portions of Barnstable and Plymouth counties, the Cape Cod Times reported.

The distribution of the vaccine baits to the north and west of the Cape Cod Canal will con-

tinue through June 4, the Cape Cod and Southeast Massachusetts Rabies Task Force said in a statement. About 68,000 oral rabies vaccine baits will be distributed.

Using a helicopter allows the state's wildlife services to get baits into areas not accessible by vehicle. The program is designed to boost wildlife rabies vaccination rates and prevent the reemergence of raccoon rabies.

The vaccine is contained in baits that have a strong fish smell, unpleasant to people but attractive to raccoons, which are then vaccinated against rabies after consuming the baits, the statement said.

Courthouse needs major repairs after flooding

GA ALBANY — A courthouse in southwest Georgia needs extensive repairs after a water leak caused flooding throughout the building.

Officials determined that a leaky water line connected to a third-floor coffee machine went undetected for two days before unleashing a soggy mess inside the Albany Dougherty Judicial Building, WALB-TV reported.

Heidi Minnick, facilities management director for Dougherty County, said water gushed down a stairway like a waterfall.

The building is dry now, but remains closed. Minnick said roughly one-third of the building will need some type of repairs.

County officials are waiting on insurance adjusters to give a cost estimate.

— From wire reports



Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting World, National and Military News

MLB mired in offensive slump

Associated Press

Don Mattingly starred in the action-packed 1980s.

Now the Miami Marlins manager, Donnie Baseball worries about a record lack of hits — and not just from his team's bats.

"I don't think it's cyclical at this point," he said. "There's so much swing and miss, it's kind of off the charts. I think it's something that we have to address."

It's the Season of the Slump, even for All-Stars like Marcell Ozuna (.202), Charlie Blackmon (.184) and Francisco Lindor (.189). Miguel Cabrera, the only Triple Crown winner in a half-century, is batting .140.

Major league batters are hitting just .232 overall through April, down from .252 two years ago and under the record low of .237 set in the infamous 1968 season that resulted in a lower pitcher's mound.

The Mendoza line may not mean what it used to.

Strikeouts have averaged 9.06 per team per game, on pace to set a record for the 13th consecutive full season — up from 8.81 two years ago and nearly double the 4.77 in 1979. Strikeouts already are 1,092 ahead of hits, just three years after exceeding hits for the first time over a full season.

Hits are averaging a record-low 7.63 after fluctuating from 8 to 10 from 1937 through last year, excepting 1968's dip to a then-alarming 7.91.

While it's a bear market for batters, pitchers are on bull runs.

Joe Musgrove of San Diego and Carlos Rodón of the Chicago White Sox became the second pair of pitchers in a half-century to throw April no-hitters, the first since Atlanta's Kent Mercker and Minnesota's Scott Erickson in 1994. Arizona's Madison Bumgarner pitched another, but the shortened seven-inning gem in a doubleheader was not recognized by MLB.

Mattingly, a six-time All-Star, never struck out more than 43 times in a season during a career from 1982-92.

Texas slugger Joey Gallo already has whiffed 40 times, as has Cincinnati's Eugenio Suárez.

"Pitching has always been further ahead in the analytical world, and applying information to the competition has been much faster on the run-prevention side than the run-production side," said Detroit Tigers manager A.J. Hinch, a former big league catcher.

"I have great concern that our sport has turned into a lack of offense and the strikeout-homer-walk Three True Outcomes is not our best entertainment product. ... We're trending in the wrong direction. It doesn't mean we can just snap our fingers and make a rule change or do one simple thing and all of a sudden we're going to turn into a more balanced sport."

Detroit finished April with a .199 batting average, on track to shatter the low of .211 set by the 1910 Chicago White Sox.

Just 16.6% of pitches have been put in play this season through midweek, according to MLB Statcast, matching last year and down from 18.6% in 2015.

Perhaps it's the Rawlings baseballs, which were slightly deadened this year in a change MLB said an independent lab found would cause balls to fly 1 to 2 feet shorter when hit over 375 feet. Or maybe it's the five teams that added humidors to their stadiums, raising the total to 10 of 30 with humidity-controlled storage spaces.

Home runs have dropped from a record 1.39 per team per game in 2019 to 1.28 in 2020's shortened season to 1.14 this year, the lowest since 2015.

Data shows pitchers are throwing harder in the analytical age, where many big leaguers have had their mechanics ana-

lyzed at Driveline Baseball, Cressey Sports Performance or the American Sports Medicine Institute in an effort to gain velocity, efficiency and durability.

The average four-seam fastball velocity was 93.5 mph, according to Statcast, up from 93.4 mph last year and 92.9 mph in 2015.

And batters have refined their swing paths in an effort to hit home runs, less distressed about strikeouts than Ruth & Gehrig or even Willie, Mickey & the Duke.

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred declined comment, saying it was only one month. Union head Tony Clark, a former All-Star first baseman, also declined comment.

Many baseball veterans try not to draw conclusions from Aprils, when cold and blustery weather can hold down offense. Still, a comparison to previous seasons through April is startling.

The batting average was the lowest through April since .230 in 1968, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. The .309 on-base percentage was the lowest since .294 in 1968 and the .3894 slugging percentage a mark not seen since 2014's .3389, Elias said.

"It's an inconsistent weather month, which tends to depress offense a little bit. I tend to kind of hold off judgment until we get into the summer months," New York Yankees manager Aaron Boone said. "I would say pitching now is as good as it's been and as specific as it been."

Jacob deGrom of the Mets has a 0.51 ERA, on track to break the post dead-ball era record of 1.12 set by the St. Louis Cardinals' Bob Gibson in 1968.

"You see deGrom — you can see guys go out and punch out 14, 15, you're like, OK, it's not like not that big of a deal anymore," Mattingly said. "It seems like teams are striking out 12, 15 times a night, and that's just normal."

Lightning hold off Red Wings

Associated Press

DETROIT — The defending Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay Lightning have not lost a game this season when leading after two periods. The last two NHL teams to pull off that feat in the regular season — Pittsburgh in 2016 and Chicago in 2015 — went on to hoist the Cup.

"I like those stats," Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper said after the Lightning beat the Detroit Red Wings 2-1 on Sunday, holding onto a lead after 40 minutes for the 25th time this year.

Blake Coleman scored 16 seconds into the game, Mikhail Sergachev added another goal early in the second period, and the Lightning killed three penalties late in the game.

"It's definitely not the way you draw it up, taking three penalties consecutive, but the kill was championship hockey," Coleman said. "That's how you have to close out games."

Tampa Bay's Christopher Gibson had 22 saves, filling in for star goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy. Cooper said the team has a plan for how to use Vasilevskiy and that included scratching him for a second straight game.

Jonathan Bernier gave up a goal on the game's first shot and finished with 40 saves for the Red Wings, who went 0-for-4 on the power play.

"Our goaltending has been very good, and our power play hasn't been good enough," coach Jeff Blashill said. "Bernie was good, and when we needed our power play to score, they didn't."

The Lightning are 5-0-1 in their last six games, pulling within two points of Central Division-leading Carolina and into a tie with Florida.

Pollock, Beaty power Dodgers' rout

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — A.J. Pollock drove in eight runs and Matt Beaty knocked in seven for the Los Angeles Dodgers, with both players hitting early grand slams in a 16-4 defeat of the Milwaukee Brewers.

Pollock homered twice and doubled while Beaty went 4-for-6 and scored three times. Their slams came against Alec Betsinger (0-1), who gave up 11 runs in his big league debut.

This was the first time in franchise history that the Dodgers had two players with at least seven RBIs in the same game. The last time it happened for any major league team was on Aug. 22, 2007, when Jarrod Saltalamacchia and Ramon Vazquez each had seven RBIs for Texas in a 30-3 blowout of Baltimore.

Chris Taylor scored five runs, going 3 for 3 for the Dodgers. Julio Urias (4-0) allowed one run in seven innings.

Jacob Nottingham hit two homers for the Brewers, who reacquired him from Seattle earlier in the day.

Mets 8, Phillies 7: Pete Alonso capped New York's six-run eighth inning with a three-run double, and the Mets used a defensive meltdown by Philadelphia and a replay reversal to win on the road.

Michael Conforto snapped a tie with a bases-loaded walk against José Alvarado, driving in Jose Peraza, and Alonso followed with a liner off David Hale that split the gap in right-center for an 8-4 lead.

The Phillies got a run back in the ninth on Roman Quinn's RBI triple. After a Matt Joyce walk, Rhys Hoskins hit an opposite-field drive off Edwin Díaz that was initially ruled a tying three-run homer first base umpire Jose Navas.

Yankees 2, Tigers 0: Corey Kluber handcuffed Detroit batters to earn his 100th career win with his most dominant performance since 2018, and host New York completed its first series sweep this season.

Kluber (2-2) looked like the pitcher who won AL Cy Young Awards with Cleveland in 2014 and 2017, before injuries wrecked his 2019 and 2020 seasons.

The 35-year-old right-hander allowed two hits in eight innings. He struck out 10 and walked one.

Nationals 3, Marlins 1: Max Scherzer delivered in a hurry, tossing a five-hitter to lead host Washington over Miami. The three-time Cy Young Award winner hustled out of Nationals Park after a game that took only 2 hours, 37 minutes, dashing to be with

wife Erica for the birth of their third child.

Scherzer (2-2) carried a shutout into the ninth inning before Isan Díaz led off with a home run. The right-hander struck out nine without a walk.

Ryan Zimmerman hit a three-run homer as the Nationals improved to .500 with its fourth straight win.

Marlins rookie Trevor Rogers (3-2) gave up three runs in five innings.

Blue Jays 7, Braves 2: Marcus Semien homered and drove in four runs as Toronto finished off a three-game sweep of Atlanta in Dunedin, Fla.

Blue Jays newcomer George Springer exited early with leg fatigue. He was the designated hitter for the fourth consecutive game since making his Toronto debut after being slowed by a strained oblique and quadriceps strain.

Ryan Borucki (3-1) won in relief. Ian Anderson (2-1) lasted just four innings, allowing four runs and six hits.

Braves catcher Travis d'Arnaud went on the 60-day injured list with a torn ligament in his left thumb.

Rays 5, Astros 4: Austin Meadows hit a three-run homer and later scored the go-ahead run on Manuel Margot's pinch-hit single in the seventh inning as host Tampa Bay beat Houston.

The Rays avoided a three-game sweep in a series between the last two American League champions.

Twins 13, Royals 4: Andrelton Simmons and Mitch Garver homered in a seven-run third inning, and rookie Alex Kirilloff went deep for the fourth time in three games as host Minnesota routed Kansas City.

José Berríos (3-2) took advantage of his team's tear at the plate to win for the first time in four starts. Berríos gave up four runs and struck out nine in six innings.

Indians 5, White Sox 0: José Ramirez and Cesar Hernandez homered, Amed Rosario had three hits and Cleveland won at Chicago.

Zach Plesac (2-3) and three relievers limited the White Sox to four hits as the Indians took two of three in a series between AL Central foes that both made the playoffs last year. Cleveland has won five of their last seven.

Rangers 5, Red Sox 3: David Dahl and Brock Holt each hit an RBI single in Texas' three-run eighth inning, and host Texas took advantage of a costly error by Boston outfielder Alex Verdugo.

Isiah Kiner-Falefa homered to help the

Rangers take three of four from the AL East leaders. Josh Sborz (3-1) got three outs for the win, and Ian Kennedy earned his seventh save in seven opportunities.

Reds 13, Cubs 12 (10): Nick Castellanos hit a game-ending single off Craig Kimbrel (0-1) in the 10th inning to give host Cincinnati a wild win over Chicago.

Castellanos finished with five hits and four RBIs against his former team, including two of the Reds' five homers. Mike Moustakas, Eugenio Suárez and Tucker Barnhart also connected.

Cardinals 3, Pirates 0: Carlos Martínez pitched eight marvelous innings, Harrison Bader hit an early three-run homer and St. Louis shut down host Pittsburgh for a three-game sweep.

The Cardinals have won seven straight against the Pirates and is 20-6 versus Pittsburgh since the start of the 2019 season. The sweep was the second in three series for St. Louis, who have won eight of 10 overall.

Giants 7, Padres 1: Kevin Gausman pitched six effective innings and scored twice, Mike Tauchman homered and drove in four runs, and San Francisco won at San Diego to prevent a three-game sweep.

Tauchman hit a three-run shot in the third off Joe Musgrove (2-3) to help the Giants remain atop the NL West.

Diamondbacks 8, Rockies 4: Stephen Vogt hit a go-ahead, two-run triple, Josh Rojas and Daulton Varsho added RBI doubles and host Arizona topped Colorado.

The game was tied at 4 when Josh VanMeter led off the Diamondbacks eighth with a walk. David Peralta singled with one out and Vogt followed with a drive down the right-field line. Arizona has won 10 of 13 since a 5-10 start.

Athletics 7, Orioles 5: Center fielder Ramón Laureano robbed Baltimore of the likely go-ahead run with a leaping catch in the eighth inning and then hit a tiebreaking, two-run homer in the bottom half to send host Oakland to a win.

Yusmeiro Petit (4-0) won in relief of starter Sean Manaea to help the Athletics avoid a sweep.

Mariners 2, Angels 0: Justus Sheffield shook off early control problems to allow just two hits over six innings, leading host Seattle over Los Angeles.

Sheffield (2-2) and four relievers combined on a five-hitter as the Mariners won two of three in the series. Rafael Montero closed for his fourth save in eight opportunities.

Lowry lifts depleted Raptors past Lakers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Kyle Lowry had 37 points and 11 assists, Pascal Siakam had 39 points and 13 rebounds and the short-handed Toronto Raptors defeated the Los Angeles Lakers 121-114 on Saturday.

LeBron James had 19 points, seven rebounds and six assists before going back to the locker room with 6:42 to play. It was the second game back for James after missing 20 because of a sprained right ankle.

Toronto ended a three-game losing streak despite not having Fred VanVleet, OG Anunoby, Chris Boucher or Gary Trent Jr. available because of injuries or to rest after losing at Utah on Saturday. DeAndre' Bembry had 14 points off the bench and the Raptors led by as many as 21 to hand the defending NBA champion Lakers another baffling defeat.

Kyle Kuzma had 24 points for Los Angeles, Anthony Davis chipped in with 12 and Andre Drummond had 19 points and 11 rebounds.

Bucks 117, Nets: 114: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 49 points, Khris Middleton had 26 points and 11 rebounds, and host Milwaukee edged Kevin Durant and Brooklyn.

Antetokounmpo also had eight rebounds, four assists and three blocked shots. He

went 21 for 36 from the field, helping Milwaukee overcome a terrific performance by Durant. Antetokounmpo finished three points shy of his career high, set against Philadelphia in March 2019.

Kings 111, Mavericks 99: Buddy Hield scored 27 points, Marvin Bagley III had 23 points and nine rebounds and visiting Sacramento completed a season sweep of Dallas.

All three games were in a span of 15 days, which the Mavericks finished with a 6-0 record against the other teams while going 0-3 for the second time in three seasons against the Kings.

76ers 113, Spurs 111: Joel Embiid had 34 points and 12 rebounds, and Philadelphia held on to win at undermanned San Antonio.

Ben Simmons tipped in the game-winner off a miss from Embiid as time expired. Embiid had four points in overtime, all on free throws.

Trail Blazers 129, Celtics 119: CJ McCollum scored 10 of his 33 points in the fourth quarter and Portland extended its winning streak to four with a win at Boston.

Damian Lillard had 26 points and 13 assists for the Trail Blazers. Carmelo Anthony finished with 13 points — including a three-

pointer with 1:08 remaining to help seal it after the Celtics pulled within two points.

Suns 123, Thunder 120: Devin Booker scored 32 points and Phoenix won at Oklahoma City.

Former Thunder guard Chris Paul had 18 points and 11 assists, and Torrey Craig added 18 points and 10 rebounds for the Suns, who shot 54%. Phoenix entered the night one-half game behind Utah for the best record in the Western Conference.

Knicks 122, Rockets 97: Julius Randle scored 31 points in three quarters to lead New York to the victory at Houston.

Randle, who had seven rebounds and six assists, scored 15 points in the third quarter to pad the lead and spent the fourth quarter on the bench with the game out of reach. He scored at least 30 points for the fourth time in five games.

Heat 121, Hornets 111: Bam Adebayo had 20 points and 10 rebounds, Jimmy Butler added 18 points, eight rebounds and eight assists, and surging Miami moved into sole possession of sixth place in the Eastern Conference with a win at Charlotte.

The Heat's win combined with Boston's 129-119 loss to the Portland Trail Blazers leaves Miami (35-30) a full game ahead of the Celtics with seven games remaining.

Busch gets birthday win to follow up his truck win

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Kan. — Kyle Busch thought he had a third-place car Sunday. His crew chief, Ben Beshore, though it was good enough for second.

Both of them turned out to be wrong. Busch was perfect on a pair of late restarts and won a two-lap sprint to the finish at Kansas Speedway, becoming the 10th different winner through the first 11 races of a topsy-turvy NASCAR Cup Series season.

On his 36th birthday, no less.

"We ran up front all day," Busch said. "Just trying to make adjustments all day long to get it where we wanted. The final adjustments were a positive for us. Didn't necessarily take us from a third-place car to a winning car, but the restarts did."

Busch had stalked Kyle Larson all afternoon before beating him on a late restart to take the lead. Then, after another caution in the closing laps, Busch followed up his Truck Series win Saturday night by earning another trip to victory lane.

"That's a Kyle Busch win right there," he said with a smile.

It's his 17th straight season with a win, tying David Pearson for second on the all-time list and moving him within one of Richard Petty's record streak. It also was his first with Beshore calling the shots from the pit box, and it gives Joe Gibbs Racing three drivers qualified for the playoffs along with Martin Truex Jr. and Christopher Bell.

"I felt like we were a second-place car to the 5 car all day, to be honest," Beshore said. "Kyle just did an amazing job on the last couple of restarts there, taking the lead and then keeping it on the last couple."

Kevin Harvick overcame a tire mishap on a late pit stop and took advantage of some chaos on the final restart to finish second. Brad Keselowski dominated the early laps before following his win at Talladega last week by finishing third, and Matt DiBenedetto and Chase Elliott rounded out the top five.

Larson led a race-high 132 laps before his

day ended in 19th place and bitter disappointment.

O'Ward gets first IndyCar win

FORT WORTH, Texas — Pato O'Ward felt calm while he enjoyed the ride in the closing laps in Texas, getting his first IndyCar Series victory at the track closest to the Mexican-born driver's hometown.

"It's really cool to do it in a place that's very close to my heart, is very close to home," said O'Ward, whose win came four days before his 22nd birthday. "It's a great place to do it. A lot of my family was here, so it's really cool to share this moment with them."

O'Ward passed Josef Newgarden with 23 laps to go Sunday and stayed in front the rest of the way in the No. 5 for Arrow McLaren SP. The organization will now follow through with a promise to let O'Ward test a Formula One car at the end of this year.

The race was the second in as many days at Texas, and was marred by the IndyCar's second first-lap crash of the season.