

## Kids' turn arrives for COVID vaccine

*Associated Press*

Hugs with friends. Birthday parties indoors. Pillow fights. Schoolchildren who got their first COVID-19 shots Wednesday said these are the pleasures they look forward to as the U.S. enters a major new phase in fighting the pandemic.

Health officials hailed shots for kids aged 5 to 11 as a major breakthrough after more than 18 months of illness, hospitalizations, deaths and disrupted education.

Kid-sized doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine cleared two final hurdles Tuesday — a recommendation from CDC advisers, followed by a green light from Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

At a Decatur, Ga., pediatrician's office Wednesday, 10-year-old Mackenzie Olson took off her black leather jacket and rolled up her sleeve as her mother looked on.

"I see my friends but not the way I want to. I want to hug them, play games with

them that we don't normally get to," and have a pillow fight with her best friend, Mackenzie said after getting her shot at the Children's Medical Group site.

With the federal government promising enough vaccine to protect the nation's 28 million kids in this age group, pediatricians' offices and hospitals began inoculating children, with schools, pharmacies and other locations planning to follow suit in the days ahead.

The atmosphere surrounding the launch of shots for elementary-age students was festive in many locations. California vaccine sites welcomed children with kid-friendly motifs like inflatable animals and handed out coloring books and prizes. Vehicles lined up before dawn at an Atlanta site where a 10-year-old girl bounced around her family's car in excitement.

Many pediatricians' offices were expecting strong interest in the shots at least initially, but health officials are worried about

demand tapering off. Almost two-thirds of parents recently polled by the Kaiser Family Foundation said they would wait or not seek out vaccines for their kids.

Brian Giglio, 40, of Alexandria, Va., brought his 8-year-old son, Carter, in for vaccination at Children's National Hospital in Washington, D.C., where kids with underlying conditions got first dibs. Carter has Type 1 diabetes that puts him at risk for complications if he were to become infected.

Giglio said the vaccine was "like a hallway pass for us to begin living life again." And Carter said he can't wait to leave masks behind once he's fully vaccinated, so he can smell the things he used to be able to smell without it.

"I'm ready to trash it," he said, though the CDC still recommends masks in schools and indoor public spaces where virus activity is high, even for the fully vaccinated.

## Air Force IG releases report on deadly Afghan airstrike

**BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS**

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Confirmation bias, limited communication and a heightened threat environment led to the military's Aug. 29 airstrike that mistakenly killed 10 Afghan civilians, Air Force Gen. Sami Said said Wednesday, but no criminal negligence was to blame.

Said, the Air Force inspector general, said his review of the airstrike revealed no criminal wrongdoing, instead calling it "an honest mistake." Operators believed they were targeting a car with Islamic State fighters and explosives when they launched the attack, but further investigation revealed it was a civilian vehicle with packages.

"I found given the information they had, the analysis that they did — I understand they reached the wrong conclusions — but ... was it reasonable to conclude what they concluded based on what they had? It was not unreasonable," Said said.

Said was ordered in September to review the drone strike investigation that revealed

three men and seven children were killed in the attack that took place three days after 13 American troops died in an Islamic State attack at the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul.

U.S. and coalition troops were there evacuating Americans and Afghans from the country in the final days of the U.S. military's involvement in Afghanistan.

"The issue here is to figure out what we could have done better to make sure this never happens again," Said said. "I never found an instance where somebody is I asked a question of 'Why did you decide that?' and I got crickets or I got an illogical answer."

Said told reporters Wednesday at the Pentagon that his investigation discovered "execution errors combined with confirmation bias and communication breakdowns that regrettably led to civilian casualties."

Confirmation bias happens when a person interprets a series of intelligence reports or other information in a way that supports one assumption without considering alternate

theories, Said said.

"You can interpret the intelligence in a way that leads you to further believe that this is the vehicle of interest, but you can also interpret it as benign," Said said.

To address the issues, the classified report made three recommendations to prevent similar mistakes in the future.

The report recommended implementing strike cell procedures to mitigate the risk of confirmation bias and sharing situational-awareness information more broadly across the strike cell and with supporting elements operating elsewhere.

"[It] will provide better insight and better cross-check of what exactly are we looking at? What are we seeing what else could it be? Are we interpreting the intelligence in an appropriate way or not?" Said said.

The general said the timing of the attack on U.S. forces caused airstrike operators to be on high alert for potential threats, contributing to a confirmation bias that led to the military accidentally targeting the civilians.

# US, Japanese troops hold natural disaster exercise

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
AND MARI HIGA  
*Stars and Stripes*

KADENA AIR BASE, Okinawa — U.S. forces on Okinawa for the first time joined their Japanese military counterparts to rehearse their unified response to a natural disaster — a simulated earthquake Tuesday on a small, nearby island.

This year's Remote Island Disaster Exercise, or RIDEX, involved about 200 Marines and airmen from the III Marine Expeditionary Force and Kadena Air Base, along with 400 troops from the Japan Self-Defense Force, Air Force Capt. Matthew Wilson, the 353rd Special Operations Wing's director of medical operations, told Stars and Stripes this week.

A Japan Ground Self-Defense Force spokesman for the Western Army's 15th Brigade summed up the purpose of this year's exercise.

"We aim to improve the JSDF's ability to respond to disaster situations in remote islands and to strengthen cooperation with related organizations such as the U.S. military," he said on the customary condition of anonymity.

Japan's Self-Defense Forces have held the island disaster exercise every year since 2014, except last year, because of the

pandemic, the spokesman said.

The exercise scenario involves an earthquake off Okinawa's southeast coast. A second day of drills involving the Self-Defense Forces and Okinawa prefecture was inexplicably canceled, the spokesman said.

During the exercise Tuesday, medical personnel from the two nations confronted language barriers under trying conditions.

"We pretty frequently will train in scenarios in our small teams to most effectively treat and move a patient, so that's less important to us today," said Lt. Col. Shana Hirschert, 39, the senior flight physician for the 353rd Special Operations Wing. "This is pretty unique that we can kind of integrate our teams."

The exercise began at Ukibaru Island, less than five miles off Okinawa's east coast, Wilson said. A mix of 20 Japanese and American troops simulating injuries ranging from severe burns to broken bones were airlifted to the amphibious transport dock JS Kunisaki.

Air Force Staff Sgt. Christopher Andersen, 25, a medic with the special operations wing, said the training provided good insight into Japanese military operations. He said he was blown away by their professionalism and organizational skills.

## Japanese Coast Guard saves Marines captured by rip current on Okinawa

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
AND MARI HIGA  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A group of Okinawa-based Marines were rescued by the Japan Coast Guard after they were sucked out to sea while snorkeling, coast guard officials said.

The incident began shortly before 3:25 p.m. Saturday just off Sосу Beach at Kuni-gami village on the northeastern tip of Okinawa, a spokesman for the coast guard's 11th Regional Headquarters told Stars and

Stripes by phone Thursday.

Five Marines from Camp Schwab were snorkeling when three of them were swept away from shore, the spokesman said. The Marines were plucked from the ocean about two hours later and delivered to the U.S. military, he said.

"I am so glad that they didn't lose their lives," another spokesman, from the Nakagusuku Coast Guard Office, told Stars and Stripes on Thursday. It's customary in Japan for some government officials to speak to the media on condition of anonymity.

## Poll: S. Koreans like US alliance with Biden more

BY DAVID CHOI  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — Most South Koreans see the alliance with the United States as stable, a dramatic increase over last year, according to an annual poll from a government-funded think tank.

The Seoul-based Korea Institute for Defense Analysis polled 1,000 South Koreans, 67% of whom view the alliance favorably. The figure represents a "substantial" increase from last year's 47%, and the two years prior to 2020.

"The relatively low level of stability perceived by the public during these past few years implies that they were concerned about the disharmony between [South Korean President Moon Jae-in] and the Trump administration over North Korea policies," Hong Sukji, an institute fellow, wrote in her analysis published Tuesday.

Foreign policy analysts questioned the relationship between the two allies during President Donald Trump's tenure. Trump, who railed against North Korea with threats of "fire and fury" before holding summits with its leader, also criticized the U.S. trade relationship with South Korea and demanded Seoul foot more of the bill for stationing roughly 28,500 American troops on the peninsula.

"In contrast, the sharp improvement in the sense of stability within the alliance suggests that anxiety regarding the [South Korea]-U.S. Alliance is being alleviated due to consistent signaling by the Moon and Biden administration reaffirming their firm relations since the inauguration of the Biden administration in January 2021," Hong wrote.

Other evidence from the poll suggests more South Koreans believe the U.S. would come to their aid than in previous years. Asked if the U.S. will be "fully committed to the defense of South Korea if there is a military provocation by North Korea," 77% of respondents said they agreed, compared to 62% last year.

Most respondents also viewed the alliance as a positive force on the peninsula: Nearly 94% said they agreed it is "contributing to the peace and stability of South Korea."

# Istanbul protesters place hood on Navy civilian

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

Turkish authorities detained 17 members of a political organization after protesters put a hood over the head of a U.S. Navy civilian in Istanbul.

Youth Union of Turkey, also known as Türkiye Gençlik Birliği, posted a photo Tuesday to two Twitter accounts, and in one post, the group claimed to have put a “sack on the head of an American soldier.”

In a statement, the Istanbul governor’s office said the 17 people detained had targeted a civilian employee of a U.S. Navy ship that “came to our city as part of a port visit,” according to Reuters.

USS Mount Whitney, the U.S. 6th Fleet’s flagship, arrived in Istanbul on Monday and entered the Black Sea on Thursday to join

the destroyer USS Porter.

In addition to putting the hood on the civilian’s head, the group also chanted “you are our enemy, and you are not wanted here. ... Yankee go home,” Reuters reported.

U.S. 6th Fleet didn’t comment Thursday on the incident. At a media briefing Wednesday, Defense Department spokesman John Kirby thanked Turkey for its swift action and responsiveness. He referred further questions to Turkish authorities.

The United States and other NATO members and partners routinely conduct military exercises in the Black Sea.

Personnel from Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO and 6th Fleet, both under the command of Vice Adm. Gene Black III, were aboard USS Mount

Whitney, 6th Fleet said in an Oct. 29 statement.

On Wednesday, the ship hosted a reception that included the U.S. ambassador to Turkey and various Turkish dignitaries, according to 6th Fleet. Black spoke at the reception.

“It is very important to be here and to deepen our maritime cooperation. Turkey is a very valuable NATO ally,” he said. “Achieving economic prosperity in the Black Sea region depends on the stability to be achieved at sea.”

This isn’t the first time TGB has protested the U.S. by putting hoods over Americans’ heads.

In 2014, it attacked a group of service members from the destroyer USS Ross who were dressed in civilian clothes. The protesters threw red paint on at least one service member and put

a plastic sack over his head, calling him a murderer, the pro-government Turkish newspaper Daily Sabah reported.

The newspaper said putting hoods on U.S. service members is viewed as revenge for a 2003 incident in Iraq, in which U.S. military personnel detained and put hoods on Turkish soldiers operating as part of a special operations team. U.S. officials had accused the soldiers of plotting to kill an American-backed Iraqi official. The New York Times reported at the time.

On its English-language website, TGB says it stands up for a secular and populist Turkey. The group says it “was founded in order to unite Turkish youth — ignoring whether they’re leftists or rightists — to defend the motherland.”

## Marines announce plans to adjust recruiting, retention

*The Washington Post*

The Marine Corps released a new plan Wednesday that says it must overhaul how it recruits and retains Marines, suggesting for the first time in decades that threats posed by China and other adversaries require personnel changes that could require some shrinking of the service to accommodate a new emphasis on keeping trained personnel.

Gen. David Berger, commander of the Marine Corps, said he sees no alternative but to pivot away from a system that through multiple wars has prioritized massing a “young, physically tough, replaceable force” that was “not all that highly skilled.”

For the past 35 years, Berger said, the service has turned over about 75% of its force each year, rotating annually through thousands of young enlisted Marines who join for four years, while other services retain a higher percentage of troops.

“We’re the anomaly, and we

brag about it — and I think it’s worked for us,” Berger said. “It will not work for us going forward, I don’t think.”

Berger said the Marine Corps is going to have to “treat people like human beings instead of inventory,” making it appealing for more who already have experience to stay. There is urgency to do so, he said, because rising challenges such as China will require mature, experienced service members who possess multiple skills and can act on their own in the absence of communications with higher headquarters.

The plan, “Talent Management 2030,” amounts to a significant cultural shake-up for a service that once told Americans in recruiting advertisements that they were “looking for a few good men.” It also calls for the service to promote equity and diversity among Marines and create “lateral” ways for people with coveted skills to join the service without starting at bottom ranks.

## USAF grants more than 1,800 vaccine exemptions

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Air Force has granted 1,866 airmen and Space Force guardians exemptions from the mandatory coronavirus vaccination, the vast majority for medical reasons, according to service data released Wednesday.

The data also showed 8,486 active-duty airmen and guardians remained unvaccinated without an approved exemption as of Wednesday, one day after the Air Force’s deadline for its troops to be fully vaccinated or request an exemption. Among those unvaccinated service members, 4,933 had requested a religion-based exemption, but the service had yet to approve any religious accommodation as of Wednesday, the data showed.

Service officials said 800 troops in the Air Force and Space Force had outright refused the vaccine without seeking an exemption, leaving them exposed to potential punishment including dismissal

from the military. The officials declined to provide further information, however, including whether the service had discharged any of those individuals to date. Officials said earlier this week that the service had kicked out 40 trainees who declined vaccination and issued them uncharacterized, entry-level discharges.

The Air Force on Tuesday became the first Pentagon military service to reach its vaccination deadline for active-duty troops, after the Defense Department mandated in August that personnel take the coronavirus vaccine.

The Air Force will spend 30 days reviewing additional requests for medical and religious exemptions to the vaccine, the service said in a statement. Medical exemptions will be approved by service medical providers for a variety of reasons, including issues such as an allergy to a vaccine ingredient, officials said. Religious accommodations can be granted by commanders.



# Iran marks US Embassy takeover anniversary

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Thousands of Iranians gathered on Tehran streets Thursday for the anniversary of the 1979 seizure of the U.S. Embassy, chanting “Death to America” and “Death to Israel,” and burning American and Israeli flags. The embassy takeover triggered a 444-day hostage crisis and break in diplomatic relations that continues to this day.

The government-organized commemoration, long a venue for voicing anti-Western sentiment, typically draws angry

crowds each year. Last year, authorities canceled the event due to the still-raging coronavirus pandemic but on Thursday, state TV said that 800 cities across Iran staged demonstrations.

Protesters hoisted an effigy of President Joe Biden wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the Star of David, drops of red paint dripping from its mouth. It wasn’t clear whether the demonstrators were trying to make a point or were simply recycling old props from their 2019 parade, but the figure’s mop of orange hair resembled

that of the effigy of former President Donald Trump used at the rally two years ago.

In a lengthy speech to the crowds, Gen. Hossein Salami, chief of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, denounced the United States as a “dictator-making factory” and took aim at what he called American aggression in the region, declaring that “children of this nation (Iran) will stand bravely against any power that wants to damage their interests.”

Gathered Iranians waved flags and raised portraits of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the

powerful commander killed in early January 2020 in an American drone strike in Baghdad ordered by Trump.

A large American flag was spread on the street, forcing those marching to walk over it.

Long-simmering tensions between the U.S. and Iran have flared again in recent months after Iran’s election of ultra-conservative President Ebrahim Raisi, which brought hardliners to power across every branch of government and stalled Tehran’s negotiations with world powers to revive its now-tattered 2015 nuclear deal.

## EU: Iran nuclear deal talks to resume Nov. 29

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The European Union announced on Wednesday that talks between world powers and Iran to revive the troubled 2015 Iran nuclear deal will resume in Vienna on Nov. 29.

The EU said the meeting of the commission of the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action will be attend-

ed by high-level officials from Iran, China, France, Russia, Germany and Britain.

“Participants will continue the discussions on the prospect of a possible return of the United States to the JCPOA and how to ensure the full and effective implementation of the agreement by all sides,” a statement said.

The JCPOA was aimed at

curbing Iran’s nuclear activity in exchange for the lifting of crippling sanctions. The U.S. pulled out of the accord under former President Donald Trump and reimposed sanctions on Iran.

European nations have tried to bring the U.S. back into the nuclear accord, but their efforts had been frustrated so far by the unwilling-

ness of Tehran’s new hardline government to resume formal talks that would include reopening parts of the 2015 deal.

President Joe Biden and European leaders criticized Tehran last week for what it saw as accelerated and provocative nuclear steps as Iran continues to enrich uranium to near-weapons-grade levels.

## Stranger charged with abducting 4-year-old girl in Australia

Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia — Cleo Smith was back to her laughing, bubbly self as she played in the backyard of her Australian west coast family home on Thursday, hours before a 36-year-old stranger was charged with abducting the 4-year-old from a camping tent more than two weeks ago.

Police charged Terry Kelly, a local resident, with forcibly taking a child among other offenses, a police statement said.

Kelly appeared briefly in court in the town of Carnarvon where a magistrate refused to release him on bail.

Police visited Cleo’s family in Carnarvon as they prepared to

gather crucial eyewitness evidence involving Kelly, who is suspected of snatching her from a campground north of the town of 5,000 people on Oct. 16.

“I can only see her on the outside, but from that point of view, I’m amazed that she seems to be so well-adjusted and happy, and it was really ... heartwarming to see that she’s still bubbly and she’s laughing,” Detective Senior Sergeant Cameron Blaine said.

“I’m sure that it has had an impact, but just to see her behaving quite naturally like a 4-year-old girl should do and just enjoying being in the presence of her little sister and her family was good,” Blaine added.

Blaine was part of a four-member police team that used a battering ram to smash into a locked house early Wednesday and rescue Cleo. The lights were on and she was alone playing with toys in a house less than a 10-minute drive from her own, police said.

“My name is Cleo,” the smiling girl told the police officers who rescued her and asked her name as confirmation that they had found the right child.

Kelly was arrested in a nearby street at about the same time, police said.

Detective Superintendent Rod Wilde, who heads the police investigation, said specialist child interviewers had traveled to Carnarvon from the state capital

Perth, 560 miles to the south.

“The main concern around that is Cleo’s welfare,” Wilde said of the interview.

“We have experienced people that will undertake that and it’ll take as long as it takes. We’ll sit down with the family and work out the appropriate time,” Wilde added.

Police would not comment on whether Cleo was interviewed before Kelly was charged.

Kelly was taken from police detention to a hospital late Wednesday and again on Thursday, with what media reported were self-inflicted injuries.

Wilde said Kelly had since returned to the police station and was “speaking to officers.”

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Ruling: Policy, not DNA, decides paternity claims**

**AZ** PHOENIX — An Arizona court says state law comes down in favor of a man who voluntarily acknowledged paternity of a child and not another man shown by DNA results to be the child's genetic father.

The state Court of Appeals decision Tuesday said Arizona law clearly declares the importance of providing "permanency and stability for a child" and that a voluntary acknowledgment of paternity "creates a presumption of paternity like that arising from a marriage or a birth certificate."

Arizona law sets strict limits on legal grounds and time frames for contesting voluntary acknowledgments of paternity, and those criteria weren't met by the man shown by DNA results to be the genetic father, the decision said.

According to the decision, the mother said either man might have been the father and neither man knew of the other's relationship with the mother during the period when conception occurred.

**Man gets 17 months for bribing postal workers**

**NJ** NEWARK — A New Jersey man was sentenced to 17 months in prison for bribing postal workers to steal packages.

Jabre Beauvoir, 23, had pleaded guilty in June to one count of bribery. U.S. District Judge Kevin McNulty imposed the sentence Tuesday and also ordered Beauvoir to pay restitution of about \$24,000.

The U.S. attorney's office alleged that in the summer of 2019 Beauvoir bribed U.S. Postal Ser-

vice employees in Elizabeth to steal mail containing checkbooks and credit cards, usually paying them \$100 per package.

Prosecutors alleged that Beauvoir and others then used the checks and credit cards to fraudulently obtain money. Two Elizabeth postal workers have pleaded guilty and await sentencing.

**2 roofers electrocuted after ladder touched lines**

**NH** DERRY — Two workers from a roofing company were electrocuted when their ladder came into contact with overhead wires in Derry, police said.

The men suffered life-threatening injuries Monday night and were taken to separate hospitals in Boston, police said. Their conditions weren't immediately known.

The Occupational Health and Safety Administration is investigating.

**31 tornadoes breaks state's October record**

**OK** OKLAHOMA CITY — A total of 31 tornadoes last month was a record-high for October in Oklahoma dating to 1950, according to the National Weather Service.

The previous high for October, the fifth most active month for tornadoes, was 27 in 1998, according to weather service records. Those records show that March-June are the four most active months for twisters in Oklahoma.

The most powerful of last month's tornadoes was an EF2 that struck Oct. 10 near Anadarko with wind speeds of 113-157 mph. The twister was one of 17 recorded in the state that day as strong storms also spawned tornadoes and severe weather in parts of

Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Texas.

Another 13 tornadoes were recorded on Oct. 12-13, and one was recorded on Oct. 27.

No deaths were reported from the October Oklahoma twisters.

**Lack of pedestrian bridge delays school opening**

**HI** KIHAI — A new high school on Maui won't be welcoming students as planned next fall because the state Department of Education didn't build a pedestrian bridge to the campus.

The state Land Use Commission on Thursday voted unanimously to stick to its earlier decision to require the state to build the bridge over Piilani Highway to Kihei High School, Hawaii News Now reported. That means the school won't be able to open for the fall 2022 semester.

The busy highway separates the school from neighborhoods where many students live. Currently, public school students in Kihei are enrolled at Maui High School, which is overcrowded. There are some charter school options in the area.

The commission in 2013 said either a pedestrian overpass or an underpass would be required for safety.

A department spokesperson said the department is assessing its next steps.

**Wild horse dies from contaminated water**

**NC** COROLLA — Contaminated water is being blamed for the death of a wild horse on North Carolina's Outer Banks.

The Corolla Wild Horse Fund announced that an 8-year-old stallion known as Taco died last

week. The horse was known because of a lump he had on his hip. He's the fourth stallion in the last two years to die due to bacteria or other contaminants in the water, the group said.

"Every single loss is a tragedy when you have such a small population to begin with, but some hit a bit harder than others," the group wrote. "Taco had such a big personality."

Officials have collected water from various locations in the horse's territory and will send it out for testing.

**2 more school districts drop Indian mascots**

**MI** HARTFORD — Two more Michigan school districts are dropping Indian nicknames and images.

Saranac in Ionia County and Hartford in Van Buren County are the latest to make the change.

Hartford Superintendent Kelly Millin said the district, known as the Indians, was greatly influenced by members of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi. The Indian mascot will no longer be used by the end of the school year.

"What once served as a representation for culture, no longer carries the same point of pride for all that see it, and we have been asked to change our Native American logo and mascot," Millin said in a letter to the community.

The Saranac school board last week voted to "respectfully retire the Redskin mascot."

Camden-Frontier schools in Hillsdale County and the Sandusky district in Sanilac County still call themselves Redskins, MLive.com reported.

More Michigan districts still use "Indians."

— From wire reports

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# Larson can cap comeback with title

*Associated Press*

Kyle Larson has heard that mental toughness is required to win a championship. He has no idea if that's true — and if it is required, well, then he doesn't consider himself the championship favorite this weekend.

Toughness, Larson said, makes him think of veteran driver Kevin Harvick. And when he thinks about mental toughness, Larson points to Tony Stewart and the 2011 news conference where Stewart trash-talked Carl Edwards right out of the title.

But Larson? Tough? He's 5-foot-6 and 135 pounds. When asked what weapon he'd choose in a zombie apocalypse, Larson said he'd take his orders from fellow drivers Chase Elliott, Ryan Blaney and Corey LaJoie. He'd let them be in charge.

"People tell me all the time you have to be mentally tough to win the championship, and I feel like enough people hype it up to where you have to act different come play-off time," Larson said. "But I'm not a tough guy. So I don't know how to be tough. I don't know what I'm 'supposed' to be doing."

He is doing just fine.

The 29-year-old Larson has been deemed a future NASCAR champion his entire career. He came to the series as a 19-year-old sprint car sensation and those who know such things said Larson was even better than both Jeff Gordon and Stewart, a pair of drivers who started on dirt and are now NASCAR Hall of Famers.

He didn't disappoint upon his 2012 arriv-

al, but his Chip Ganassi Racing equipment was rarely fast enough. Larson tallied an underperforming six wins with Ganassi.

Still, he was a highly desired free agent at the end of the 2020 season and Larson likely could have named his price with a new team — right up until he used a racial slur while racing online early in the pandemic. NASCAR suspended him for the season, Ganassi had to fire him to placate angry sponsors and Larson wasn't sure if he'd ever be back.

But here he is, headed into Sunday's race in Arizona in the comeback of all comebacks. He is the star driver of Hendrick Motorsports, the winningest team in NASCAR that hired him out of his banishment a year ago, and the favorite to close out his nine-win season with a championship.

On the track he's been virtually unbeatable. He also has turned sponsor HendrickCars.com into one of the hottest car-buying sites around. His contract was extended through 2023.

Larson, in his seventh full Cup season, is Hendrick's new guy.

Asked if Larson has done everything he expected when he gave him the No. 5 Chevrolet for a second chance in NASCAR, Hendrick said: "More. Much more than I would anticipate him doing."

"He's been the front of our whole program for feeding people. I don't know any driver out there as busy as that guy is, that spends as much time trying to do good for other people," Hendrick said. "If you just look at his track record, what he's accom-

plished this year, going and visiting food banks, schools, giving money away, just trying to be a model citizen. ... He did that on his own."

Larson spent his season of exile mostly back in the sprint car world, traveling the country in a motorhome with his wife and two children, jumping from track to track, car to car, wherever the show was in town. He very publicly won 46 races.

Larson says he was naive, not racist, when he said the "n-word" in April 2020. And he was OK if the consequence for not knowing any better meant the end of his promising NASCAR career.

"Until it happened, I didn't really think that I was ever going to make it back to the Cup Series and nothing looked too promising," Larson said. "I accepted it. I was having the time of my life racing, sprint cars and midgets and then dirt late models. I was doing stuff that I always wanted to do — maybe didn't think I'd be doing it at 28 years old — but I did accept it."

He is now the driver so many predicted he was going to be. He twice this season put together three-race winning streaks and was the driver the day Hendrick Motorsports passed Petty Enterprises as the winningest team in NASCAR.

Larson won four times in the playoffs and his win two weeks ago at Kansas made him the only one of the four championship drivers to win his spot in the finale.

## Chiefs: Rodgers' absence doesn't alter preparation

*Associated Press*

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Chiefs insisted Wednesday that their preparation for the Green Bay Packers would not change upon learning that league MVP Aaron Rodgers had tested positive for COVID-19 and would miss their matchup this weekend.

That doesn't mean there weren't a few relieved smiles behind closed doors.

After all, rather than face one of the game's best quarterbacks Sunday at Arrowhead Stadium, Kansas City and its much-maligned defense likely will get second-year pro Jordan Love

making his NFL starting debut.

"It's definitely disappointing," said Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, who has become close friends with Rodgers in part through shared endorsement deals. "I've watched him a long time. I feel like I play a similar style. You always want to play the best. Hopefully he's healthy, it's not too bad and he comes back stronger than before."

After Kansas City plays the Packers, of course.

Then again, it's not like Mahomes would be responsible for slowing down Rodgers and the Green Bay offense. That task

falls to a defense that ranks near the bottom of the league in just about every meaningful statistical category, even after the Chiefs played better on that side of the ball in a 20-17 comeback win over the Giants on Monday night.

The Packers should still have running back Aaron Jones, who creates plenty of problems. They also hope to have Devante Adams back after their star wide receiver missed last week's win in Arizona with COVID-19, and running mate Allen Lazard, who had to miss the showdown in the desert because he's unvaccinated and was

deemed a close contact.

"Adams is one of those receivers, it doesn't matter who is throwing him the ball. He's a tough cover," Kansas City safety Tyrann Mathieu said. "The more I watch Jones, I like the way he runs the football. A lot of straight-line speed, a lot of power for his size. He runs through a lot of arm tackles. That's going to be a tough task for us."

Still, they won't have Rodgers delivering them the ball downfield.

That's good news for the Chiefs given the way he's sliced them up in their past two meetings.



# Durant scores 32, three-happy Nets win

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Kevin Durant scored 32 points and led the spurt that broke open the game late in the third quarter, and the Brooklyn Nets beat the Atlanta Hawks 117-108 on Wednesday night for their third straight victory.

Durant had 13 points in a 20-4 run to end the third that turned a tie game into a 16-point Nets lead going to the fourth. He added seven rebounds and five assists overall.

Joe Harris made six three-pointers and scored 18 points, James Harden had 16 points and 11 assists, and the Nets finished 4-2 on their homestand after making 22 three-pointers.

**76ers 103, Bulls 98:** Joel Embiid had 18 points, nine rebounds and seven assists in his return to the lineup, and Seth Curry scored 22 points and hit a crucial jumper late to lead host Philadelphia over Chicago.

Georges Niang added 18 points to help the short-handed

76ers win their fourth in a row. In addition to Ben Simmons (personal reasons), who has missed all eight games, Philadelphia was without starters Tobias Harris (health and safety protocols) and Danny Green (hamstring).

**Mavericks 109, Spurs 108:** Jalen Brunson had 31 points and 10 rebounds, Luka Donic added 23 points and 12 rebounds and Dallas rallied to a win at San Antonio.

Tim Hardaway Jr. also had 23 points for the Mavs.

**Pacers 111, Knicks 98:** Myles Turner scored 25 points, hitting 7 of 10 three-pointers, and had 13 rebounds in host Indiana's victory over New York.

Turner scored the first eight points of the game — and the Pacers never trailed. Caris LeVert added 21 points for Indiana.

**Clippers 126, Timberwolves 115:** Paul George had 32 points and eight assists, Reggie Jackson scored a season-high 29

points and Los Angeles won at Minnesota.

George shot 11-for-18, including 4-for-8 from long distance, as the Clippers had their best shooting night of the season and won their second straight game. They shot 60.3% from the field and made a season-high 21 three-pointers on 36 attempts.

**Celtics 92, Magic 79:** Jaylen Brown scored 28 points and Boston used an 18-1 run at the start of the second half to roll to a win at Orlando.

Jayson Tatum added 14 points to help the Celtics snap a three-game losing streak and beat the Magic for a seventh consecutive time.

**Raptors 109, Wizards 100:** Fred VanVleet scored a season-high 33 points, OG Anunoby added 21 and Toronto won at Washington for its fifth straight victory.

Svi Mykhailiuk and Gary Trent Jr. each added 15 points for the Raptors.

**Grizzlies 108, Nuggets 106:**

Jaren Jackson Jr. had 22 points, eight rebounds and three blocks in host Memphis' victory over Denver.

Ja Morant added 18 points, six rebounds and six assists, and Desmond Bane and Kyle Anderson had 16 points each. Bane's three-pointer with 1:19 remaining gave the Grizzlies the lead for good in their second straight victory over the Nuggets.

**Cavaliers 107, Trail Blazers 104:** Jarrett Allen had 24 points and 17 rebounds in Cleveland's win over visiting Portland.

**Kings 112, Pelicans 99:** Tyrese Haliburton scored seven of his 20 points during a big run early in the fourth quarter and host Sacramento beat New Orleans.

**Warriors 114, Hornets 92:** Jordan Poole took the pressure off Stephen Curry with a season-best 31 points and host Golden State pulled away to beat Charlotte.

## Big Ten bowl race crowded at top, murky in the middle

Associated Press

With four weeks to go in conference play, the Big Ten's three highest-ranked teams remain in pursuit of a spot in the College Football Playoff.

The races in both divisions are tight, with half of the league harboring goals of reaching the conference championship. In the middle and back of the pack, even for the handful of long-shots, bowl eligibility is still on the table.

But postseason projections, while fodder for fans and analysts, are hardly part of a team's regular game plan.

"If you don't win the next one, you are going to go from being first to fifth or whatever it may be," said Minnesota quarterback Tanner Morgan, whose team is in first place in the West Division. "Any team can beat

you any week, so you have to be at your best. We're humble enough to know that anybody can beat us on any Saturday."

There's no program more committed to the art of staying present in the moment than the Gophers under coach P.J. Fleck, whose limits to looking beyond the current opponent — as publicly stated, at least — are the offseason and the bye week.

"I know you guys probably laugh when we say, 'one-game championship season' or whatever, but that's really our mantra, our mentality. This game is all we've got," Morgan said. "If we don't win this week, who knows what next week holds?"

The Gophers (6-2, 4-1) host Illinois (3-6, 2-4) on Saturday in the epitome of a trap game, given that the Illini beat Penn State on Oct. 23 in that NCAA-record

nine-overtime grind. Minnesota then plays at No. 19 Iowa (6-2, 3-2) on Nov. 13 in the first of two rivalry games for the Gophers that will determine the West Division title. They host Wisconsin (5-3, 3-2) on Nov. 27, after a game at Indiana (2-6, 0-5).

### Who wins the West?

Wisconsin would claim a seventh Big Ten championship-game berth in 11 seasons of the divisional format by winning out — a legitimate scenario after an uncharacteristic 1-3 start. The Badgers visit Rutgers (4-4, 1-4) on Saturday and host Northwestern (3-5, 1-4) and Nebraska (3-6, 1-5) before the battle for Paul Bunyan's Axe at Minnesota.

Backsliding Iowa plays at Northwestern on Saturday. After the crucial game against the

Gophers, the Hawkeyes finish with Illinois and Nebraska.

Losing earlier in the season to the Gophers and the Badgers hurts Purdue (5-3, 3-2) in the hunt. The Boilermakers play host to No. 5 Michigan State (8-0, 5-0) Saturday and visit No. 6 Ohio State (7-1, 5-0) on Nov. 13 before finishing with Northwestern and Indiana.

### Beasts of the East

Michigan State has a path to the East Division title with no outside help required after beating archenemy Michigan (7-1, 4-1) last week. The Spartans play at Purdue on Saturday and host Maryland (5-3, 2-3) on Nov. 13, before the big finish at No. 6 Ohio State (7-1, 5-0) on Nov. 20 and at home against No. 22 Penn State (5-3, 2-3) on Nov. 27.

# Canes edge Blackhawks, run to 9-0

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Carolina was just OK for much of the first two periods, and then found its game in the third.

The Hurricanes are undefeated for a reason.

Jesper Fast and Martin Necas scored 3:09 apart in the third, and Carolina beat the Chicago Blackhawks 4-3 on Wednesday night.

"The guys dug in. That's all I can tell you," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "You're not always going to come out with those type of results, but it was a great effort at the end for sure."

Derek Stepan had a goal and an assist as Carolina matched a franchise record with its ninth straight victory. Seth Jarvis added his first career goal in his second game, and Frederik Andersen made 27 saves in the opener of a challenging three-game trip.

At 9-0, the Hurricanes moved into a tie with the 2015-16 Montreal Canadiens for the NHL's third-longest win streak to begin a season. Next up is a trip to Florida for a Saturday matchup with the Panthers, who were 8-0-1 heading into their game against Washington on Thursday night.

"That's going to be a tough one. We know that," Brind'Amour said. "You know you look forward to it."

Alex DeBrincat had two goals for Chicago, which lost 6-3 at Carolina on Friday night. Patrick Kane had a goal and an assist, and

Marc-Andre Fleury made 28 stops.

The Blackhawks were coming off their first win in their 10th game of the season, but they were unable to build on that 5-1 victory over Ottawa.

"It's just another hard lesson," coach Jeremy Colliton said. "But I would like us to stop learning hard lessons and respond with a change in how we think about the game."

The Blackhawks led 3-2 after two, but the Hurricanes tied it 17 seconds into the third. After Chicago defenseman Jake McCabe turned it over, Andrei Svechnikov made a nice pass to Fast in the middle and he beat Fleury for his fourth of the season.

Necas then put the Hurricanes ahead to stay on a shot from the right circle that trickled past Fleury for his second at 3:26.

**Oilers 5, Predators 2:** Leon Draisaitl had two goals and an assist to take the NHL scoring lead—a point ahead of teammate Connor McDavid — and host Edmonton beat Nashville.

Draisaitl has 20 points on nine goals and 11 assists. McDavid assisted on both of Draisaitl's goals.

Kailer Yamamoto, Devin Shore and Jesse Puljujarvi also scored, and Mikko Koskinen made 31 saves to help the Western Conference-leading Oilers improve to 8-1-0.

Matt Duchene and Ryan Johansen scored for Nashville, and Conor Ingram stopped 24 shots. The Predators had won four in a row.

**Blue Jackets 5, Avalanche 4 (OT):** Jake Bean scored twice, including the winner 1:12 into overtime, and visiting Columbus rebounded after surrendering a late two-goal lead to beat Colorado.

Bean skated in and lined a shot through the pads of Avalanche goaltender Jonas Johansson as the Blue Jackets improved to 4-0 this season in games decided after regulation.

Cole Sillinger scored twice and Boone Jenner added a goal for Columbus, which finished its three-game trip with a 2-1 mark. Joonas Korpisalo stopped 28 shots.

Down 4-2 in the third, Colorado got a goal from J.T. Compher with 3:26 remaining and tied it up on Bowen Byram's second goal of the game with 52 seconds remaining. Logan O'Connor also scored for Colorado. Johansson made 32 saves for the Avalanche.

**Kings 3, Blues 2 (SO):** Arthur Kaliyev scored in the fourth round of a shootout and host Los Angeles extended its winning streak to three games with a victory over St. Louis.

Both teams scored twice in the first three rounds of the tiebreaker. Adrian Kempe and Alex Iafallo also converted for the Kings. David Perron and Jordan Kyrou made their shots for the Blues.

Kempe and Kaliyev scored third-period goals for Los Angeles, which trailed 1-0 after two. Jonathan Quick made 33 saves as the Kings avoided being swept in the three-game season series.

## Sabres end stalemate, deal Eichel to Golden Knights

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Jack Eichel era in Buffalo is over, with a nasty public eight-month feud reaching a conclusion on Thursday when the Sabres traded their former captain and face of the franchise to the Vegas Golden Knights.

The trade ends a stalemate between Eichel and Buffalo over how to repair his herniated disk, which has sidelined him since March. The dispute revolved around the NHL's collective bargaining agreement giving teams the final say over the treatment of injuries.

Though Eichel remains sidelined, the Golden Knights addressed their biggest long-term

need in landing a top-line center by trading forward Alex Tuch, rookie center Peyton Krebs and two draft picks to the Sabres.

Eichel is expected to have the disk replacement surgery he preferred, though the recovery timetable means he'll likely miss most if not all of the remainder of the season. The length of the dispute also essentially eliminates Eichel's chance to represent the United States at the Winter Olympics, which will be held in Beijing in February.

Sabres doctors favored Eichel having fusion surgery and opposed the disk replacement procedure because it has never been conducted on an NHL player.

Eichel was the Sabres' highest-paid player and is in the fourth year of an eight-year, \$80 million contract. He topped 20 goals in each of his first five seasons and enjoyed a breakout year in 2019-20, when he had a career-best 36 goals in 68 games before the season was abruptly canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Overall, he finishes with 139 goals and 355 points in 375 career games with Buffalo.

Buffalo acquired a top-10 protected first-round pick in the 2022 draft and a 2023 second-round selection. Vegas also acquired a 2023 third-round pick.

The feud became public in May, when Eichel revealed what

he called "a disconnect" with the team over treating the injury, and he questioned his future with a franchise that once regarded him as a key building block after selecting him with the No. 2 pick in the 2015 draft.

The dispute escalated over the summer, with Eichel changing agents in August in a bid to spur a trade. In September, the Sabres stripped Eichel of his captaincy before the start of training camp.

In recent weeks, Eichel's camp began threatening to file a grievance through the NHL Players' Association, questioning whether Sabres doctors followed the collective bargaining agreement in giving his option of surgery serious consideration.