

Biden, Xi open to restoring military talks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed Wednesday to restore some military-to-military communications between their armed forces as the two leaders met for hours on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco.

Both sides pledged cooperation that would bring the U.S. and China closer to resuming regular talks under what's known as the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement, which until 2020 had been used to improve safety in the air and on the sea.

"That's been cut off. That's been worrisome," Biden said at a news conference after his meeting with Xi. "So we're back to direct, open, clear, direct communication."

A senior U.S. official said the military communication agreements mean that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin can meet with his Chinese counterpart once that person is named. The official spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss a private meeting.

This also opens the door for agreements at less-senior levels, including allowing the Hawaii-based commander of U.S. Pacific forces to engage with counterpart theater commanders, the official said. Xi said he and Biden agreed to resume high-level military dialogues on the basis of equity and respect, according to a statement released by China Central Television, the state broadcaster.

The agreement comes after U.S. military leaders had expressed repeated concerns about the lack of communications with China, particularly as the number of unsafe or unprofessional incidents between the two nations' ships and aircraft has spiked.

According to the Pentagon's most recent report on China's military power, Beijing has "denied, canceled or ignored" military-to-military communications and meetings with the Pentagon for much of last year and this year. The report warns that the lack of such talks "raises the risk of an operational incident or miscalculation spiraling into crisis or conflict."

The U.S. views military relations with China as critical to avoiding any missteps and maintaining a peaceful Indo-Pacific region. More than 15 years ago, the Defense Department was making progress in a growing effort to improve relations with Beijing as both sides stepped up military activities in the Indo-Pacific.

The U.S. was concerned about Beijing's dramatic and rapid military growth. And China was suspicious of America's expanding presence in the region. In an effort to improve transparency and communication, defense leaders from the two countries were meeting regularly. And in a 2008 speech in Singapore, then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates noted that relations with China had improved, and that a long-sought direct telephone link between the U.S. and China had finally been established. He said

he had used it to speak with the defense minister.

He and other defense chiefs, Joint Chiefs chairmen and regional high-level U.S. commanders routinely traveled to China over the next decade, and Chinese defense leaders came to the Pentagon. "We don't want miscalculations and misunderstandings and misinterpretations. And the only way you do that is you talk to each other," noted then-Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel in 2013. The following year Hagel made a historic visit to Yuchi Naval Base and became the first foreign visitor to go aboard China's first aircraft carrier as it was docked at the base.

Even as military leaders were meeting, the Obama administration's widely touted "pivot to the Pacific," which added troops, ships and other U.S. military activity in the region, triggered vehement criticism from Beijing. And China's aggressive campaign to militarize a number of manmade islands in the South China Sea alarmed the U.S. and other allies in the Pacific.

Allies worried that China would seek to limit international transit through the region, and that the islands could be used as bases for military action. In 2018, the Trump administration abruptly withdrew an invitation for Beijing to participate in the military exercise known as Rim of the Pacific, citing what it called strong evidence that China had deployed weapons systems on the islands.

Warship shoots down drone launched from Yemen

By MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The guided-missile destroyer USS Thomas Hudner shot down a drone launched from Yemen over the Red Sea early Wednesday, according to two defense officials.

"While transiting the international waters of the Red Sea, the crew of the USS Thomas Hudner engaged a drone that originated from Yemen and was heading in the direction of the

ship. There were no U.S. casualties or any damage to the ship," a defense official said in a statement on the condition of anonymity.

It was not clear Wednesday who is responsible for launching the drone. Earlier this week, the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen threatened to attack ships in the Red Sea.

This is the second intercept by a U.S. Navy vessel since Hamas militants attacked Israel on

Oct. 7. Last month, the USS Carney shot down several drones and missiles fired by Houthi forces in the direction of Israel.

The latest incident comes after the Houthis shot down a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drone last week over the Red Sea.

The U.S. has sent an additional 1,200 troops to the Middle East in recent weeks along with two aircraft carrier strike groups and more aircraft to support Israel in its fight against

Hamas and deter an escalation of the conflict in the region.

The United States has also carried out three airstrikes in Syria at sites tied to Iran-backed militants. Most recently, two strikes occurred in Syria on Sunday. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the strikes targeted a training facility near the city of Albu Kamal and a safe house near the city of Mayadeen. The previous strikes occurred Oct. 26 and Nov. 8.

Pentagon again fails its independent audit

BY DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has again failed its independent annual audit, mainly because defense officials could not provide auditors with enough information to form a full accounting evaluation, according to the Defense Department's yearly financial report released Wednesday.

"Auditing the department's \$3.8 trillion in assets and \$4 trillion in liabilities is a massive undertaking," Pentagon Comptroller Michael McCord said. "But the improvements and changes we are making every day as a result of these audits positively affect every soldier, sailor, airman, Marine, guardian and DOD civilian."

Hundreds of independent auditors examine the Pentagon's books each year to determine whether it can account for the money it's given and how effectively the military is spending it. There are three possible audit ratings — an unqualified opinion, a qualified opinion and a disclaimer of opinion.

The consolidated 2023 audit, which is the overall accounting of the Defense Department, gave a disclaimer of opinion, which means the Pentagon couldn't give auditors enough financial data to allow them to form an opinion. An unqualified, or "clean," opinion is the highest possible rating and a qualified opinion is an acceptable rating. Both mean that auditors were given enough information to make a complete judgment.

"This was the sixth year of progress toward an unmodified opinion," the department said in a statement. "Of the 29 com-

ponent standalone audits, seven received unmodified opinions, one received a qualified opinion and 18 received disclaimers of opinion."

The Pentagon said the remaining three component opinions are pending.

That includes the 2023 audit for the Marine Corps, which was granted an extension until mid-February to furnish more information to auditors.

McCord told reporters Wednesday during a conference call that the Pentagon expected it would not get a clean opinion.

"If even one large component of DOD, such as a military department, doesn't have an unmodified opinion, it's mathematically impossible for the entire department to have one," he said. "So given where we are, this was not a surprise."

The Pentagon has never passed the yearly audit. The first audit only became federally required in 2018 and the department has been trying to pass them ever since. The 2022 audit also earned an opinion of disclaimer and McCord said a year ago that he was disappointed that report didn't show more progress.

He seemed more pleased with the audit progress this time.

"We remain a trusted institution, and we recognize that we have the obligation to do everything to maintain that trust," he said.

"We have made a lot of progress, and I look forward to our continued improvement."

The Defense Department continues to be the only Cabinet-level department that's never earned a clean financial report.

Destroyer to be named after Native American WWII hero

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

A future Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer will bear the name of a World War II hero who was the first Native American in the Navy to earn a Medal of Honor.

It will be the service's second ship named for Cmdr. Ernest Evans, who was killed on Oct. 25, 1944, during the Battle of Leyte Gulf near the Philippine Islands, the Navy said in a statement. The battle is considered one of the largest naval engagements of World War II.

The destroyer escort vessel USS Evans, launched in 1955, also was named in his honor, according to the statement. The Navy didn't say when that ship was decommissioned.

Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, the first Native American to serve as a Cabinet secretary, will be the ship's sponsor, the statement said.

"As we honor Cmdr. Evans

with this stunning vessel, we also honor the service of Indigenous servicemembers nationwide, past and present," Haaland said in the statement.

Evans, of Cherokee and Creek heritage, enlisted in the Navy in 1926, entering the U.S. Naval Academy a year later.

In 1943, he assumed command of the Fletcher-class destroyer USS Johnston.

About a year later, the Johnston was in the lead of an offensive attack against much larger Japanese forces off the coast of the Philippines. Evans is credited with repeatedly putting the Johnston between the enemy and more vulnerable U.S. ships, saving the lives of thousands of sailors, the statement said.

The Johnston, with Evans aboard, ultimately was lost. He posthumously was awarded the Medal of Honor and earned a Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon, the Navy said.

Okinawa loses third lawsuit over Marine airfield changes

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND MARI HIGA
Stars and Stripes

NAHA, Okinawa — A Japanese court has denied another legal challenge by Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki to stop construction of a Marine Corps runway on Camp Schwab.

A three-judge panel at Naha District Court dismissed a lawsuit filed by Okinawa prefecture seeking to block changes to construction permits required by Japan's Ministry of Defense to finish the project.

The judges found the prefecture lacked standing to file suit, according to a copy of the decision released after Wednes-

day's hearing.

"The lawsuit is dismissed," Judge Hideki Fujii told the packed courtroom. The hearing lasted less than a minute.

The district court's decision is the third legal defeat for the prefecture this year. The Japan Supreme Court ruled against Okinawa in similar suits in August and September.

Tamaki, who did not appear at the proceedings, is weighing an appeal, a spokesman from the prefecture's Henoko Base Construction Countermeasures Division said by phone Thursday. Some government officials in Japan may speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

Hamas open to tentative hostage deal

The Washington Post

Hamas has agreed in principle and Israel is now considering a proposal for the release of at least 50 women and children among about 240 foreign and Israeli hostages being held by Hamas in Gaza, according to an Arab diplomat familiar with the negotiations.

In exchange for the hostages, Israel would agree to a three-to-five-day pause “in place” in the fighting, increased humanitarian aid to Gaza, and the release of an unspecified number of women and children held in Israeli prisons.

Amid reports that agreement on at least some components of a deal may be near, U.S. officials and other interested parties

spent much of Wednesday awaiting word from Israel, where internal discussions were said to be underway. Senior Biden administration officials have said this week that the United States is engaged in “hour by hour” negotiations over a hostage release with Israel and the government of Qatar, which is serving as a go-between for Hamas.

But the Arab diplomat and others familiar with the talks, all of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity about the sensitive negotiations, cautioned that the arrangement currently under discussion could fall apart, as have others up to now. Previous proposals have outlined some of the same parameters, with dif-

ferent numbers of hostages involved and conditions placed on their release.

“We should be hearing back today,” the diplomat said. If the Israelis agree, “it’s going to happen quickly. If they reject it, then we’re at it again.”

The hope is that agreement on a deal for the release of at least some of the captives could lead to further talks on freeing the remainder of those held in Gaza. Hamas has indicated previously that it will keep Israeli military hostages, estimated to number several dozen, apparently for use in separate exchanges for Palestinian militants.

The office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other members of his war cabinet re-

fused to comment.

President Joe Biden, after speaking again Tuesday with Netanyahu, told reporters about a potential hostage release that “I’ve been talking with the people involved every single day. I believe it’s going to happen.” Asked whether he had a message for families awaiting news of the captives, nine of whom are believed to be American citizens, along with one permanent U.S. resident, Biden said: “Hang in there. We’re coming.”

Hamas has told negotiators that it does not have control, or know the location, of all of the hostages—some of whom it says are being held by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, another militant group inside Gaza.

US sending Israel more ammo, missiles, DOD list shows

Bloomberg News

The Pentagon has quietly ramped up military aid to Israel, delivering on requests that include more laser-guided missiles for its Apache gunship fleet, as well as 155 mm shells, night-vision devices, bunker-buster munitions and new army vehicles, according to an internal Defense Department list.

The weapons pipeline to Israel is extending beyond the well-publicized provision of Iron Dome interceptors and Boeing smart bombs. It continues even

as Biden administration officials increasingly caution Israel about trying to avoid civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip.

The arms sought by Israel as it fights Hamas, designated as a terrorist group by the U.S. and European Union, are listed in a document labeled “Israel Senior Leader” requests that’s dated late October and is circulating in the Pentagon.

The arms are already being shipped or the Defense Department is working to make them available from stockpiles in the

U.S. and Europe, according to the document reviewed by Bloomberg News. As of late October, for example, all 36,000 rounds of 30 mm cannon ammunition, 1,800 of the requested M141 bunker-buster munitions and at least 3,500 night-vision devices were delivered, the tally shows.

A Pentagon spokesman declined to discuss specifics, but the Defense Department said in a statement that it’s “leveraging several avenues—from internal stocks to U.S. industry channels

—to ensure Israel has the means to defend itself.”

“This security assistance continues to arrive on a near-daily basis,” according to the statement.

It said the U.S. was rapidly providing precision-guided munitions, small-diameter bombs, 155 mm artillery shells and other munitions. That’s along with Iron Dome interceptors and medical support equipment.

The Israeli Embassy in Washington declined to comment on the U.S. arms supplies.

Ukraine claims foothold on Dnieper River eastern bank

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A top Ukrainian official said its troops have established a beachhead on the eastern bank of the Dnieper River near Kherson, an important advance in overcoming one of Russia’s most significant strategic barriers in the war.

Andriy Yermak, head of the president’s office, provided no details but confirmed the development that had been widely discussed in military forums over the past month.

Ever since Russian forces left the city of Kherson and the territory around it in November 2022, the only area they controlled on the west bank of the Dnieper, the river became a natural dividing line along the southern battlefield, preventing Ukrainian troops from advancing further toward Russian-annexed Crimea.

The barrier also allowed Russia to concentrate more troops in the heavily mined and fortified Zaporizhzhia region and eastern Uk-

raine. Crossing the river could allow Ukraine to outflank Russia without having to break through the Zaporizhzhia region and take the most direct route to Crimea.

Yermak said Ukraine’s military had moved “step by step” toward Crimea and covered nearly three-quarters of the distance there.

Since the summer, Ukrainian forces have crossed the river in small groups to create a foothold near the Kherson bridge

Congress OKs bill that delays shutdown fight

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ending the threat of a government shutdown until after the holidays, Congress gave final approval to a temporary government funding package that pushes a confrontation over the federal budget into the new year.

The Senate met into Wednesday night to pass the bill with an 87-11 tally and send it to President Joe Biden for his signature one day after it passed the House on an overwhelming bipartisan vote. It provides a funding patch into next year, when the House and Senate will be forced to confront — and somehow overcome — their considerable differences over what funding levels should be.

In the meantime, the bill removes the threat of a government shutdown days before funding would have expired.

“This year, there will be no government shutdown,” Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said at a news conference after the bill’s passage.

The spending package keeps government funding at current levels for roughly two more months while a long-term package is negotiated. It splits the deadlines for passing full-year appropriations bills into two dates: Jan. 19 for some federal agencies and Feb. 2 for others, creating two deadlines where there will be a risk of a partial government shutdown.

The two-step approach was not favored by many in the Senate, though all but one Democrat and 10 Republicans supported it because it ensured the government would not shut down for now. Sen. Patty Murray, the Washington Democrat who chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee, vot-

ed for the bill but said it would eventually “double the shutdown risk.”

The spending bill also does not include the White House’s nearly \$106 billion request for wartime aid for Israel and Ukraine, as well as humanitarian funding for Palestinians and other supplemental requests. Lawmakers are likely to turn their attention more fully to that request after the Thanksgiving holiday in hopes of negotiating a deal.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, who crafted the plan, has vowed that he will not support any further stopgap funding measures, known as continuing resolutions. He portrayed the temporary funding bill as setting the ground for a spending “fight” with the Senate next year.

The new speaker, who told reporters this week that he counted himself among the “arch-conser-

vatives” of the House, is pushing for deeper spending cuts. He wanted to avoid lawmakers being forced to consider a massive government funding package before the December holidays — a tactic that incenses conservatives in particular.

But Johnson is also facing pushback from other hardline conservatives who wanted to leverage the prospect of a government shutdown to extract steep cuts and policy demands. Many of those conservatives were among a group of 19 Republicans who defied Johnson on Wednesday to prevent floor consideration of an appropriations bill to fund several government agencies.

GOP leaders called off the week’s work after the vote, sending lawmakers home early for Thanksgiving. It capped a period of intense bickering among lawmakers.

Santos won’t seek reelection amid scathing ethics report

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House Ethics committee in a scathing report Thursday said it has amassed “overwhelming evidence” of lawbreaking by Republican Rep. George Santos of New York that has been sent to the Justice Department, concluding flatly that he “cannot be trusted” after a monthslong investigation into his conduct.

Shortly after the panel’s report was released, Santos blasted it in a tweet on X as a “politicized smear” but said he would not be seeking reelection to a second term. He gave no indication he would step aside before his term ends next year, vowing to pursue his “conservative values in my remaining time in Congress.”

But a renewed effort to expel him from the House was quickly launched. The House could vote on his expulsion as soon as it returns from the Thanksgiving holiday later this month.

The panel said that Santos knowingly caused his campaign committee to file false or incomplete reports with the Federal Election Commission; used campaign funds for personal purposes; and engaged in violations of the Ethics in Government Act as it relates to financial disclosure statements filed with the House.

The ethics panel’s report also detailed Santos’ lack of cooperation with its investigation and how he “evaded” straightforward requests for information.

Santos also faces a 23-count federal indictment that alleges he stole the identities of campaign donors and then used their credit cards to make tens of thousands of dollars in unauthorized charges. Federal prosecutors say Santos, who has pleaded not guilty, wired some of the money to his personal bank account and used the rest to pad his campaign coffers.

UAW members vote to approve deal with GM

Associated Press

DETROIT — United Auto Workers union members have voted to approve a new contract with General Motors, making the company the first Detroit automaker to get a ratified deal that could end a contentious labor dispute and a series of crippling strikes.

A vote-tracking spreadsheet on the union’s website shows that with all local union offices reporting, the contract passed by just over 3,400 votes, with 54.7% in favor. A union spokesman confirmed Thursday that the spreadsheet had the official totals.

The outcome was closer than expected after the UAW’s celebrations of victories last month on many key demands that led to six weeks of targeted walkouts against GM, Ford and Stellantis, the maker of Jeep, Dodge and Ram vehicles.

On Thursday the contract had

a big lead in voting at Ford and Stellantis. Ratification was leading at Ford by more than 10,000 votes, with 66.7% of ballots in favor. At Stellantis, the lead was over 5,700, with 66.5% voting for the deal, according to the UAW website.

Voting continues at Ford through early Saturday with only two large factories in the Detroit area and some smaller facilities left to be counted. At Stellantis, three Detroit-area factories were the only large plants yet to vote, with tallies expected to be complete by Tuesday.

The three contracts, if approved by 146,000 union members, would dramatically raise pay for autoworkers, with increases and cost-of-living adjustments that would translate into a 33% wage gain. Top assembly plant workers would earn roughly \$42 per hour when the contracts expire in April of 2028.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

'Santa's Train' conductor at parade busted for DUI

TN TAZEWELL — A Tennessee man was busted for DUI over the weekend while driving a motorized train for children at a parade.

The incident occurred Saturday in Tazewell — about 50 miles northeast of Knoxville — during the town's Christmas Tractor Parade when visitors reported seeing Henry Meade, 40, drive a lawnmower pulling kids in carts erratically.

Tazewell Police reported that Meade was unsteady on his feet and failed a field sobriety test, according to WATE.

He was determined to be under the influence and police found a syringe, meth and several other narcotics after he was taken into custody.

Woman convicted of fatal poisoning with eye drops

WI WAUKESHA — A jury on Tuesday convicted a Wisconsin woman of fatally poisoning her beautician friend's water with eye drops and stealing nearly \$300,000 from her.

Jessy Kurczewski, 39, of Franklin, told investigators she gave Lynn Hernan a water bottle filled with six bottles of Visine in 2018, according to a criminal complaint. A Waukesha County jury found her guilty of first-degree intentional homicide and two counts of theft in connection with Hernan's death, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported.

Hernan was found dead in her Pewaukee condo in October 2018 with crushed medication on her chest. According to a criminal complaint, Kurczew-

ski called police and said her friend wasn't conscious or breathing.

The Waukesha County medical examiner ruled Hernan's death a homicide after discovering tetrahydrozoline, an ingredient in Visine, in Hernan's system.

When investigators told Kurczewski that Hernan was poisoned and the scene was staged to look like a suicide, she said it was what Hernan wanted and she must have staged her own suicide, according to the complaint. Kurczewski later told investigators she brought Hernan a water bottle loaded with six bottles' worth of Visine, according to the complaint.

Detectives also eventually concluded Kurczewski stole \$290,000 from Hernan.

Ban for hotel owner sued for racial discrimination

SD RAPID CITY — A South Dakota woman who said she would ban Native Americans from her hotel cannot manage the establishment for four years and must publicly apologize under agreement with the U.S. Justice Department.

The federal agency announced the apology last week as part of a consent decree with owners of Rapid City's Grand Gateway Hotel.

Hotel co-owner Connie Uhre in March 2022 posted on social media that she would no longer allow American Indians on the property because of a fatal shooting at the hotel involving two teenagers who police said were Native American.

Members of the Indigenous activist group NDN Collective were denied hotel rooms

shortly after Uhre's posts.

After months of boycotts and protests against the hotel and its owners, the Justice Department stepped in and sued, alleging racial discrimination against American Indians.

Cargo plane returns after horse escapes stall

NY NEW YORK — A cargo plane headed from New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport to Belgium had to return to JFK after a horse escaped its stall and got loose in the hold, according to air traffic control audio.

The Boeing 747 operated by Air Atlanta Icelandic had just started its flight across the Atlantic Ocean on Nov. 9 when the pilot radioed air traffic control in Boston and said that a horse on board had escaped its stall.

The pilot said that due to the plane's weight, he had to dump 20 tons of fuel before going back to New York.

The cargo flight disruption was first reported by ABC News, which said the flight landed at Kennedy, took off a short time later and successfully arrived at Liege Airport the next morning, according to FlightRadar24.

State drops 'so help me God' oath for candidates

NJ TRENTON — New Jersey is dropping its requirement that candidates for office sign an oath that includes the words "so help me God" in filing paperwork for their candidacy.

NJ.com reported Wednesday that the state Division of Elections is no longer requiring candidates to sign that oath, allow-

ing them to make "a solemn affirmation or declaration" instead.

The state was being sued by James Tosone, a 70-year-old Washington Township man who said he plans to run for Congress in 2024 as a Libertarian. But as a nontheist, he said, he cannot sign part of the petition including a religious oath.

In an Oct. 24 memo to all county clerks in New Jersey, Lauren Zyriek, acting director of the state's Division of Elections, said the religious oath is no longer required.

Tosone dropped his lawsuit against the state this week.

Magnitude 3.6 quake rattles Midwestern states

IL STANDARD — A magnitude 3.6 earthquake rattled northern Illinois and parts of three other states early Wednesday, awakening some residents and spurring reports to 911 about homes shaking, the U.S. Geological Survey and police said.

The small earthquake was detected about 4:41 a.m. local time and was centered about six-tenths of a mile south-southeast of Standard, Ill., a town that's about 100 miles southwest of downtown Chicago, the federal agency said.

The temblor occurred about 2.9 miles below the Earth's surface. People living as far away as southern Wisconsin, southeastern Iowa and northwest Indiana reported that they felt the quake, said Jessica Jobe, a research geologist with USGS.

She said "weak to moderate" shaking was reported across that region but the USGS had received no reports of damage.

— From wire reports

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Cole, Snell named Cy Young Award winners

Associated Press

NEW YORK — After several close calls, Gerrit Cole finally won his first American League Cy Young Award on the strength of consistent excellence all season.

Blake Snell joined a short list of pitching royalty by turning around a terrible start.

Cole was a unanimous AL winner Wednesday and Snell took home Cy Young honors in the National League — becoming the seventh hurler to claim the prize in both circuits.

Runner-up twice before, Cole easily finished on top this time following an outstanding season for the New York Yankees. The ace right-hander received all 30 first-place votes in balloting by the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

"I'm very proud of this season. I'm very proud of some of the other seasons where I've made a pretty strong run at this award as well," Cole said on a conference call. "But it's hard to say it wasn't a little different. I

mean, there was just a lot of momentum going into this."

Cole allowed no more than two runs in 26 of his 33 starts — best in the majors. He went 15-4 with 222 strikeouts while leading the AL in ERA (2.63) and innings (209). He finished with a flourish, too, throwing a two-hit shutout at Toronto in his final outing.

He became the sixth Yankees pitcher to win a Cy Young and first since Roger Clemens in 2001. Cole and Ron Guidry (1978) were the only unanimous choices.

"It makes me tremendously proud that I feel that I'm holding up my end of the bargain in terms of those great players and those great legacies," said the 33-year-old Cole, who signed a \$324 million contract with New York in December 2019. "I'm contributing to the overall brand of what we do."

Snell was the NL winner after going 14-9 and leading the majors with a 2.25 ERA for the San Diego Padres.

The free-agent lefty was picked first on 28 of 30 ballots. San Francisco Giants right-hander Logan Webb finished second and Zac Gallen of the NL champion Arizona Diamondbacks was third.

Snell, the AL Cy Young Award recipient in 2018 with Tampa Bay, joined Gaylord Perry, Pedro Martinez, Randy Johnson, Clemens, Roy Halladay and Max Scherzer as pitchers to win in both leagues.

"It feels amazing. I'm not really good at understanding how to accept awards and not look forward," Snell said. "I'm trying to enjoy this more than the first one I won. It's really special."

Minnesota Twins right-hander Sonny Gray was the AL runner-up with 20 second-place votes, and Kevin Gausman of the Toronto Blue Jays finished third.

Cole and Snell shined for disappointing teams. Both the Yankees and Padres finished 82-80 despite having two of baseball's three highest payrolls, and nei-

ther made the playoffs.

Shaking off a dreadful start to the season, Snell had 234 strikeouts in 180 innings over 32 outings. He was 1-6 with a 5.40 ERA after losing to Boston on May 19, then dominated the rest of the way despite topping the majors with 99 walks this year.

"I just kept telling myself how good I was," Snell explained.

Snell gave up only 5.75 hits per nine innings, by far the best mark in the big leagues. All those stingy numbers while he was on the mound were more than enough to beat out Webb (11-13, 3.25 ERA) and Gallen (17-9, 3.47), who each logged at least 210 innings. Both got one first-place vote.

Snell, a Seattle native who turns 31 next month, became a free agent after the World Series. He rejected a \$20,325,000 qualifying offer from the Padres on Tuesday to pursue a more lucrative contract.

"I'm excited to be a free agent," he said. "I don't really know what to expect."

Athletics' move to Las Vegas officially approved by owners

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — The Oakland Athletics' move to Las Vegas was unanimously approved Thursday by Major League Baseball team owners, cementing the sport's first relocation since 2005.

A 75% vote of the 30 teams was necessary for approval of A's owner John Fisher's plan, which was endorsed by baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred.

"There was an effort over more than a decade to find a stadium solution in Oakland," Manfred said Thursday. "It was John Fisher's preference. It was my preference. ... It didn't happen."

After years of complaints about the Oakland Coliseum and an inability to negotiate government assistance for a new ballpark in the Bay area, the A's plan to move to a stadium to be built on the Las Vegas Strip with \$380 million in public financing approved by the Nevada government.

"Incredibly difficult day," Fisher said. "We gave every effort, did everything we

could to find a solution there."

The Athletics' lease at the Coliseum runs through 2024, and they will remain next season at the outdated and run-down stadium where they have played since moving to California in 1968. It remains unclear where the team will play after that until a new ballpark opens, which Fisher said will be in 2028.

Las Vegas will become the franchise's fourth city, the most for an MLB team. The A's played in Philadelphia from 1901-54, then moved to Kansas City for 13 seasons before going to California. The new stadium will be the team's fifth after Columbia Park (1901-08), Shibe Park (1909-54), Memorial Stadium (1955-67) and the Coliseum.

Since the Washington Senators became the Texas Rangers for 1972, the only other team to relocate was the Montreal Expos, who became the Washington Nationals in 2005.

The A's in 2006 proposed a ballpark in Fremont, about 25 miles south in the East Bay, but abandoned the plan three years later. San

Jose, 40 miles south of Oakland, was proposed in 2012 but the San Francisco Giants blocked the site because it was part of that team's territory.

After the A's chose a site in the Oakland area near Laney College, it was rejected by the college and neighbors. The franchise then focused on the Howard Terminal area of Oakland, though a financing plan was never reached after some approvals were gained.

The team announced April 19 that it had purchased land in Las Vegas, then a month later replaced that location with a deal with Bally's and Gaming & Leisure Properties to build a stadium on the Tropicana hotel site along the Las Vegas Strip.

Nevada's Legislature and governor approved public financing for a \$1.5 billion, 30,000-seat ballpark with a retractable roof that will be close to Allegiant Stadium, where the NFL's Oakland Raiders moved to in 2020, and T-Mobile Arena, where the current Stanley Cup champion Vegas Golden Knights started play in 2017 as an expansion team.

Analysis: Green hurt Warriors more than Gobert

Associated Press

Golden State's Draymond Green is probably going to be enshrined in the Basketball Hall of Fame one day, even with career averages of around 9 points, 7 rebounds and 6 assists per game. He'll have, at minimum, four NBA championships and two Olympic gold medals when he's all done.

He'll also have baggage. So much baggage.

The latest addition to that pile came Wednesday when the NBA handed Green a five-game suspension, one that'll cost him about \$770,000 in missed salary and won't help a Warriors team that is already without an injured Stephen Curry and not off to the hottest of starts at just 6-6.

Green earned every bit of that suspension after putting Minnesota's Rudy Gobert in a headlock during the Warriors-Timber-

wolves game on Tuesday night. It was his second ejection in a span of five days and the 19th — including playoffs — of his career, which is nearly twice as many as any other two currently active players in the league combined.

"Not much to say," Gobert said after the game. "It was clown behavior."

Some say clown, some say Draymond being Draymond. Among Green's other famous incidents: He punched then-teammate Jordan Poole last season, plus earned suspensions for stomping on Domantas Sabonis' chest in last season's playoffs and another after a "retaliatory swipe of his hand to the groin" of LeBron James to go over the flagrant-foul-point limit in the 2016 NBA Finals, having to sit down with the Warriors up 3-1 in a series they would give away.

Add up all his technicals and fines and the money he's lost for games missed by suspension, and Green's behavior has cost him somewhere around \$2 million. He's made probably close to 100 times that amount, so it's not exactly hurting the bottom line.

But it will hurt the Warriors, who'll have to play — again — without Green and amid more distractions that he's caused. It speaks volumes that the team still defends Green, even after most onlookers would have said he was clearly in the wrong for putting Gobert in the headlock as part of a mess that started with Golden State's Klay Thompson and Minnesota's Jaden McDaniels getting tangled up.

"The Draymond piece of it, if you watched the replay, Rudy had his hands on Klay's neck and

that's why Draymond went after Rudy," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said after Tuesday's game. "I saw one replay right after it happened. Guys on the back of the bench were telling us that Rudy had Klay, and that's why Draymond went at Rudy. So that's all I know."

This suspension won't change anyone's opinion of Green. His fans will stand by him while his critics will be further empowered to rip him. It also won't change the way he plays; he'll still be a lightning rod by choice, will probably post on Instagram — just as he did a few days ago — about how he doesn't care what most people think.

Maybe Green should, or at least realize the antics just aren't worth it anymore. It's up for debate if he was truly trying to hurt Gobert. There's no argument that he hurt the Warriors.

49ers defense back to early season form after bye week

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Whether it was the rest from a week off, the addition of Chase Young, coordinator Steve Wilks' move from the booth to the sideline or a combination of all of the above, the problems on San Francisco's defense seemed to get fixed during the bye week.

After scuffling during a three-game losing streak when the 49ers struggled to stop the run, didn't generate enough pressure and had breakdowns in coverage, San Francisco's defense got back to its early season dominant form against Jacksonville.

"It felt like it. It looked like it. I was confident coming into the game," linebacker Fred Warner said. "Just kind of the self reflection through the bye week of what we need to be in terms of play styles, I think Coach Wilks called the perfect game. We made Trevor Lawrence's life hard the whole game. When we're playing hard, that's what it looks like."

San Francisco finished with five sacks thanks in part to a few strategic tweaks and the addition of Young, a bookend pass rusher across from Nick Bosa. They generated four takeaways and allowed only one field goal in the 34-3 win over the Jaguars last week that the Niners hope will carry over to the second

half of the season.

It was a far cry from the previous three games when the defense was a major culprit in a three-game losing streak. The Niners had 32 missed tackles in those games, according to Pro Football Focus, compared to just nine the previous three games. San Francisco allowed 15 plays of 20 or more yards during the skid compared to 10 in the first five games.

"I wish I had an answer for it," Warner said about the struggles. "It's kind of hard to put my finger on it as well, because it just wasn't us. It wasn't that everybody wasn't trying hard. It's just that it wasn't up to our standard at all three levels. A lot of things get covered up when you play hard in terms of tackling. Even if a guy misses a assignment, if you're playing fast, you're playing violent, some things you can cover up that way. I felt like play style more than anything is something that we needed to get back to."

Bosa said the front seven did a much better job against the run, setting edges and creating negative plays that led to more obvious passing situations.

Then the addition of Young, acquired from Washington at the trade deadline, gave San Francisco another feared pass rusher

that created more chances for everyone when the tight coverage prevented quick throws.

"Whenever you looked at our sack opportunities and when we were there, you looked in the back and nobody was open," Bosa said. "Then if maybe there was a guy open, we had a quick win on the line. It was very complementary."

But the Niners know it was just one game and they need to maintain that level of play down the stretch if they want to achieve their goals of winning the division, possibly earning the No. 1 seed in the NFC and eventually make it to the Super Bowl after losing in the conference title game the past two seasons.

That means they can't let up as they might have done a bit after dominating Dallas to improve to 5-0. San Francisco lost the next three games after that win.

"I think we learned our lesson," Bosa said. "I don't think we got complacent or anything, but it is human nature to think about your opponent and what opportunities you might have, what strengths and weaknesses they have. We just need to not so much look at our opponent, but look at ourselves and make sure that we're playing as good as we can."

Big 12 quarterbacks have been roughed up

Associated Press

Starting quarterback has been a precarious position in the Big 12.

Whether due to injuries or coaching decisions, staying on the field has been a challenge for many of the league's quarterbacks who started the season No. 1 for their programs.

Injuries have knocked out starters at some point in the season for Texas, Kansas, BYU, Baylor, Texas Tech, TCU, West Virginia and Central Florida — more than half the league.

Oklahoma State's quarterback carousel lasted through the first few games before coach Mike Gundy settled on Alan Bowman. Even Kansas State, which won last season's Big 12 championship game behind veteran Will Howard, put in freshman Avery Johnson when Howard struggled. The senior responded with his best play of the season.

The position has been as jumbled as the league standings. Seven teams are within two games of conference leader Texas.

Oklahoma and Iowa State have been injury- and rotation-free and the Sooners and Cyclones are still in the mix for the league championship. Dillon Gabriel has been exceptional at times for the Sooners, leading a win over Texas and setting school records last week against West Virginia.

Iowa State's Rocco Becht was thrust into the starting role because Hunter Dekkers was snagged by the state investigation into Iowa and Iowa State athletes engaging in sports wagering. Dekkers pleaded guilty to underage gambling and paid a fine, and hasn't played while serving an NCAA suspension.

League front-runner Texas won two games with backup Maalik Murphy in for injured starter Quinn Ewers. Ewers returned last week for the 29-26 win over TCU.

Texas has Ewers back on the field for two critical games, against Iowa State and Texas Tech. Texas is pursuing its first Big 12 title since 2009 in what will be the program's last season in the league before heading to the Southeastern Conference along with Oklahoma next summer.

"I think he was a little sore" after the TCU game, Sarkisian said. "But as the weeks go on, if we can continue to protect like we did the other night, he's going to continue to get healthy."

BYU's first season in the Big 12 included a plan to redshirt junior college transfer Jake Retzlaff as an understudy to Kedon Slovis. That plan blew up with an injury to Slovis' throwing arm, and Retzlaff struggled in losses to West Virginia and Iowa State.

UCF's Big 12 debut saw starter John Rhys Plumlee knocked off the field for a month with a knee injury.

TCU has lost three in a row behind freshman Josh Hoover, who took over for Chandler Morris (knee sprain). Morris was the starter in 2022 when he was injured in the first game. Max Duggan took over and led the Horned Frogs to the national championship game.

No team has had more hard luck at quarterback than Kansas.

The Jayhawks had the preseason offensive player of the year in Jalon Daniels in Lance Leipold's emerging program. But he has played only three games because of back problems.

Jason Bean has started in his place and led the program's historic win over Oklahoma, but he sustained a head injury last week against Texas Tech. That left the Jayhawks with walk-on Cole Ballard, the son of Indianapolis Colts general manager Chris Ballard, playing for most of a 16-13 loss.

Leipold said he is "very optimistic" Bean will return this week.

Texas Tech starter Tyler Shough broke his left leg at the end of September. It was the third consecutive season the sixth-year transfer has missed significant time due to injury.

Louisville can reach ACC title game with win at Miami

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — There were 176 ballots cast in the Atlantic Coast Conference's preseason football poll this summer. Of those voters, zero picked Louisville as league champion.

The Cardinals might prove everyone wrong.

No. 9 Louisville (9-1, 6-1 ACC, No. 10 CFP) can clinch a spot in the ACC championship game against Florida State by beating Miami (6-4, 2-4) on Saturday. The Cardinals are back in the top 10 of the AP Top 25 for the first time since reaching No. 3 in November 2016.

And make no mistake: The Cardinals are a juggernaut this season, ranked in the top 20 nationally in a slew of categories

— among them, red zone defense (3rd), third-down defense (6th), rushing defense (9th), scoring defense (12th) and total defense (16th).

"I think the most important scenario is if we win, then we definitely help our cause," said Louisville coach Jeff Brohm, who would seem to be one of the top contenders for national coach of the year. "I think at this point in the season, you always treat it as if you want to advance, you've got to win. ... You need to play your best football at the end of the year."

The math is simple: Win, and Louisville locks up second place in the ACC and a spot in the title game against the Seminoles. A loss could bring a whole slew of tiebreakers into play, depend-

ing on what other teams do over the final two weeks of the regular season.

"Louisville, very explosive on offense, very disruptive on defense ... a very complete team," Miami coach Mario Cristobal said. "A lot of good football players, and a very good opportunity for us."

Miami is coming off a 27-20 loss to Florida State, a game where the Hurricanes saw freshman quarterback Emory Williams depart with a season-ending injury to his left arm. Williams had taken over for Tyler Van Dyke as the starter; now, it's Van Dyke back in the first-string spot.

Van Dyke was very open this week about his struggles, how he's sought help — talking to

friends and family — to get through the slump and emerging from those conversations determined to not let his happiness be consumed by the game.

"Just got to be smarter with the football," said Van Dyke, who has thrown 12 interceptions this season, one more than he had in his first three years at Miami combined. "I know that. Definitely learned a lot from the last five weeks, six weeks and I've got to be better from it."

Louisville is 0-6-1 all-time at Miami, and defensive back Devin Neal said it's up to the Cardinals to bring enough energy into a road stadium to change that.

"Having energy, and the execution will take care of itself," Neal said.