

STARS AND STRIPES®

Thursday, October 15, 2020

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Senate panel sets date for Barrett vote

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate Judiciary Committee set Oct. 22 for its vote to advance Judge Amy Coney Barrett for the Supreme Court on Thursday as Democrats threw pointed objections, but were unable to stop the Republicans' drive to confirm President Donald Trump's pick before the Nov. 3 election.

The panel's action clears a key hurdle to recommend Barrett's nomination to the full Senate for a final vote by month's end.

"A sham," said Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn. "Power grab," decried Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn. "Not normal," said Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.

"You don't convene a Supreme Court confirmation hearing, in the middle of a pandemic, when the Senate's on recess, when voting has already started in the presidential election in a majority of states," de-

clared Sen. Chris Coon, D-Del.

But Republicans countered that Trump is well within bounds as president to fill the court vacancy, and the GOP-held Senate has the votes to push Trump's nominee to confirmation.

Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, said he understands Democrats' "disappointment, but I think their loss is the American people's gain."

Barrett's confirmation to take the seat of the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is on track to lock a conservative majority on the court for years to come. The shift would cement a 6-3 conservative majority on the court and would be the most pronounced ideological change in 30 years, from the liberal icon to the conservative appeals court judge.

The committee's session Thursday was without Barrett after two long days of public testimony in which she stressed that she would be her own judge and sought to create

distance between herself and past positions critical of abortion, the Affordable Care Act and other issues.

Facing almost 20 hours of questions from senators, the 48-year-old judge was careful not to take on the president who nominated her. She skipped past Democrats' pressing questions about ensuring the date of next month's election or preventing voter intimidation, both set in federal law, and the peaceful transfer of presidential power.

She also refused to express her view on whether the president can pardon himself.

"It's not one that I can offer a view," she said in response to a question Wednesday from Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont.

When it came to major issues that are likely to come before the court, including abortion and health care, Barrett repeatedly promised to keep an open mind and said neither Trump nor anyone else in the White House had tried to influ-

ence her views.

"No one has elicited from me any commitment in a case," she said.

One of the more dramatic moments came late Wednesday when Barrett told California Sen. Kamala Harris, the Democratic vice presidential nominee, that she wouldn't say whether racial discrimination in voting still exists nor express a view on climate change.

Harris asked if she agreed with Chief Justice John Roberts, who wrote in a 2013 voting rights case that "voting discrimination still exists; no one doubts that."

Barrett said she would "not comment on what any justice said in an opinion."

Asked whether "climate change is happening," Barrett said she wouldn't engage because it is "a very contentious matter of public debate." Barrett did, however, say she believes the coronavirus is infectious and that smoking causes cancer.

Navy destroyer USS Barry sails through Taiwan Strait

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A Navy destroyer passed through the Taiwan Strait on Wednesday, nearly a week after the Chinese military challenged another U.S. destroyer's presence in the nearby South China Sea.

The USS Barry cruised through the strait in accordance with international law, according to a statement from U.S. Pacific Fleet. It was the 12th such transit by a U.S. warship this year. The last was made Aug. 30 by another guided-missile destroyer, the USS Halsey.

"The [Barry's] transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," the statement said. "The U.S. Navy will continue to fly, sail and operate anywhere international law allows."

On Oct. 9, another destroyer, the USS John S. McCain, "asserted navigational rights and freedoms" in the South China Sea near the Paracel Islands, a 7th Fleet spokeswoman, Cmdr. Reann Mommsen, said in an email Thursday.

The McCain was warned by the Chinese military and told to leave, Col. Zhang Nandong, a

spokesman for the People's Liberation Army Southern Theater Command, told the country's state-run Global Times the same day.

Such operations seriously infringe China's sovereignty and national interests, and damage regional peace and stability, he told the newspaper.

"China owns undeniable sovereignty of the islands in the South China Sea and nearby waters," the report said.

China, Taiwan and Vietnam each claim sovereignty over the islands, and China has set up military airfields and outposts on them that have raised con-

cerns among surrounding nations and in the United States.

The McCain's patrol "upheld the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea recognized in international law by challenging the unlawful restrictions on innocent passage imposed by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam," Mommsen said.

"Unlawful maritime claims in the South China Sea pose a serious threat to the freedom of the seas, including the freedoms of navigation and overflight, of unimpeded trade and commerce, and of economic opportunity for South China Sea littoral nations," she added.

Navy secretary stresses priorities at Yokosuka

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Navy's top civilian leader on Thursday toured a guided-missile destroyer undergoing maintenance during his first-ever visit to the service's largest overseas base.

Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite met USS Milius sailors with a congenial, "Hi, I'm Ken," aboard the ship that has been in dry dock since early May. As the Navy pushes to grow its fleet, maintaining existing warships and extending their service lives are a continuing priority. Braithwaite told Milius sailors that while he understood their desire to be at sea, spending time training ashore and working on the ship are crucial to success.

"I know you're in the yards now, but what you're doing here will make you better prepared," Braithwaite told crews in the destroyer's bridge during his tour.

Congress in 2018 made law the Navy's goal of a 355-ship fleet, now due by 2035. Last week, Defense Secretary

Mark Esper announced a new modernization plan — dubbed "Battle Force 2045" — that boosted that goal to a mixture of 500 manned and unmanned ships within 25 years.

The Navy had 296 ships in service as of Oct. 6, according to the Naval Vessel Register.

While shipbuilding will be a top priority, Esper said during his speech Oct. 6, quick and efficient ship maintenance will also play a role. On Thursday, the Milius' commanding officer, Cmdr. Rob Niemeyer, said he spoke with Braithwaite about the "deep-dive on maintenance and preservation" on the 24-year-old destroyer at the U.S. Naval Ship Repair Facility in Yokosuka.

"We work our ships out here in 7th Fleet like nowhere else," Niemeyer said Thursday. "This maintenance period is a critical time for us to reset so that we are ready to get back in operation."

Niemeyer said the "vision of this deeper-level maintenance period" is to ensure the ship can remain in service for years to come.

Navy to build \$450M museum to replace old facility in DC

The Washington Post

The Navy announced Tuesday that it plans to build a new \$450 million flagship museum, replacing the out-of-date facility that has been at the Washington Navy Yard for more than 50 years.

The new facility would replace the existing National Museum of the U.S. Navy, which has been in Building 76, a cavernous old former gun factory at the Navy Yard.

But because it is on an active installation with tight security, public access has been difficult.

It is currently closed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"The ideal site for the new ... museum is in the vicinity of the ... Washington Navy Yard, but the final location is not yet finalized," the Navy said in a statement. The new site "will

give the public unfettered access to U.S. Navy history and heritage."

"To raise funds for the new museum, the Navy plans to partner with a registered 501(c)(3) organization that seeks to preserve, commemorate, and share the history of the U.S. Navy," the service said.

The Naval History and Heritage Command at the Navy Yard will coordinate the building of the new museum. Groundbreaking is planned for 2023, with completion around 2025.

Once completed, the Navy's museum will join the new National Museum of the U.S. Army, in Fort Belvoir, Va., which just announced that it will open on Veterans Day, and the National Museum of the Marine Corps, in Triangle, Va., which opened in 2006.

Army to encourage urgency in searching for missing troops

The Washington Post

The Army is planning to introduce a policy that would provide more urgency in finding missing soldiers, top leaders said, following a row of high-profile disappearances at Fort Hood, Texas, that left families frustrated over the depth and speed of search efforts.

Commanders have not prioritized searching for soldiers missing from the ranks, a duty status known as absent without leave, Army officials have previously said, and they currently do not proactively search for deserters.

Experts have said Army culture breeds belief that missing soldiers are malingerers or cowards, which makes finding

them a low priority. But recent high-profile disappearances and deaths of soldiers at Fort Hood have led Army officials to reexamine how that process works.

In the forthcoming policy on AWOL soldiers, the Army "will consider them missing and take immediate action to find them," according to a memo signed Tuesday by Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy, Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville and Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston.

The policy is meant to align with broader efforts by the Army to refocus care of soldiers following years of emphasis on deployments and training, according to an Army official with knowledge of the changes.

That in turn could help leaders detect problems within the ranks, the official said.

"We do not always know why people have not showed up to formation," the official said, declining to provide a name to discuss sensitive personnel issues.

"Until we know why, we have to make sure it's something that is taken seriously."

One soldier missing from Fort Hood, Army Pvt. Gregory Wedel-Morales, was declared a deserter a month after he went missing in August 2019. His remains were found in a shallow grave outside the base months later, with investigators suspecting foul play.

His mother, Kimberly Wedel, blasted the Army for what she

described as a callous indifference to finding her son. She said in an interview Wednesday that she welcomed the policy change.

"I'm glad they're taking it more seriously, and not writing off soldiers," Wedel said. "Mix that in with knowing their soldiers better, I can't begin to guess how many lives they may save."

A soldier who doesn't report for duty in 30 days is automatically designated a deserter, the Army said, even if commanders don't have evidence of where the soldier is, or if the soldier is experiencing physical or mental duress. Another soldier then takes their place in the unit.

Trump and Biden to hold dueling town halls

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump and challenger Joe Biden planned to compete for TV audiences in dueling town halls instead of meeting face-to-face for their second debate as originally planned.

The two were to take questions in different cities on different networks Thursday night: Trump on NBC from Miami, Biden on ABC from Philadelphia. Trump backed out of plans for the presidential faceoff originally scheduled for the evening after debate organizers shifted the format to a virtual event following Trump's coronavirus diagnosis.

As the pace of the campaign speeds up in its final weeks, the two candidates were first taking care of other electoral necessities Thursday: Trump had a midday rally in battleground North Carolina, and Biden was raising campaign cash at a virtual event.

Trump has also been trying to shore up support from constituencies that not so long

ago he thought he had in the bag: big business and voters in the red state of Iowa.

In a Wednesday morning address to business leaders, he expressed puzzlement that they would even consider supporting Biden, arguing that his own leadership was a better bet for a strong economy. Later, the president held his third campaign rally in three nights, this time in Iowa, a state he won handily in 2016 but where Biden is making a late push.

Trump claimed to be leading in the most recent Iowa poll he saw. "For me to only be up six, I'm a little bit concerned," he asserted. Multiple polls have shown a much closer race.

Biden, for his part, held a virtual fundraiser from Wilmington, Del., and used his appearance to say that Trump was trying to rush through Amy Coney Barrett, his nominee for the Supreme Court, to help his efforts to repeal the Obama health care law, calling that "an abuse of power."

Trump used his economic address Wednesday to play up his administration's commitment to lowering taxes and de-

regulation of industry, and he didn't hide his frustration with signs that some in the business community are tilting to Biden.

"I know I'm speaking to some Democrats, and some of you are friends of mine," Trump said in a virtual address to the Economic Clubs of New York, Florida, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Pittsburgh and Sheboygan, Wis. Should Biden be elected, he continued, "you will see things happen that will not make you happy. I don't understand your thinking."

The former vice president has collected more than \$50 million in campaign contributions from donors in the securities and investment sectors, according to the private nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics.

During his decades in the Senate representing Delaware, a center for the credit card and banking industries, Biden built relationships and a voting record in the business sector that has raised suspicion on the left but provides Wall Street with a measure of ease at the prospect of a Biden administration.

Harris suspends travel after staffer's positive test

Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. — Joe Biden's presidential campaign said Thursday that vice presidential nominee Kamala Harris will suspend in-person events until Monday after two people associated with the campaign tested positive for the coronavirus. The campaign said Biden had no exposure, though he and Harris spent several hours campaigning in Arizona on Oct. 8.

Harris had been scheduled to travel Thursday to North Carolina for events en-

couraging voters to cast early ballots.

The campaign told reporters Thursday morning that Harris' communications director and a flight crew member tested positive following a recent campaign trip.

Campaign manager Jen O'Malley Dillon said "neither of these individuals had any contact with Vice President Biden, with Sen. Harris or any other staff member since testing positive or in the 48-hour period prior to their positive test results." But O'Malley Dillon said Harris would suspend travel for several days "out of an

abundance of caution."

Harris and Biden spent several hours together that day through multiple campaign stops, private meetings and a joint appearance in front of reporters at an airport. They were masked at all times in public, and aides said they were masked in private as well. Biden and Harris have each had multiple negative tests since then. Harris has had two tests since Oct. 8, most recently Wednesday, O'Malley Dillon said. Biden's last announced negative test was Tuesday.

Earth sees hottest month of September on record

Associated Press

Earth sweltered to a record hot September last month, with U.S. climate officials saying there's nearly a two-to-one chance that 2020 will end up as the globe's hottest year on record.

Boosted by human-caused climate change, global temperatures averaged 60.75 degrees last month, edging out 2015 and 2016 for the hottest September

in 141 years of recordkeeping, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Wednesday. That's 1.75 degrees above the 20th-century average.

This record was driven by high heat in Europe, Northern Asia, Russia and much of the Southern Hemisphere, said NOAA climatologist Ahira Sanchez-Lugo. California and Oregon had their hottest Septembers on record.

Earth has had 44 straight Septembers where it has been warmer than the 20th century average and 429 straight months without a cooler than normal month, according to NOAA. The hottest seven Septembers on record have been the last seven.

That means "that no millennial or even parts of Gen-X has lived through a cooler than normal September," said North Carolina state climatologist Ka-

thie Dello, herself a millennial.

What's happening is a combination of global warming from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas and natural variability, Sanchez-Lugo said. But the biggest factor is the human-caused warming, she and Dello said.

The globe set this record despite a La Nina, which is a cooling of parts of the central Pacific that changes weather patterns and usually slightly lowers temperatures.

US layoffs remain high as 898K seek aid

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits rose last week to 898,000, a historically high number and evidence that layoffs remain a hindrance to the economy's recovery from the pandemic recession that erupted seven months ago.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department shows that the job market remains fragile, and it coincides with other recent data that have signaled a slowdown in hiring. The economy is still roughly 10.7 million jobs short of recovering all the 22 million jobs that were lost when the pandemic struck in early spring.

The job search website Indeed said its job postings were unchanged last week, remaining about 17% below last year's levels. Many employers still aren't confident enough in their businesses or in their view of the economy to ramp up hiring. Job postings had rebounded steadily over the summer, but the gains have slowed in the past two months.

The government's report Thursday said the number of people who are continuing to receive unemployment benefits dropped 1.2 million to 10 million. The decline signals that many of the unemployed are being recalled to their old jobs.

But it also reflects the fact that potentially even more people have used up their regular state benefits — which usually expire after six months — and have transitioned to extended benefit programs that last an additional three months.

District of Columbia

WASHINGTON — Melania Trump said Wednesday that her and the president's teenage son, Barron, tested positive for the coronavirus not long after his parents, but had no symptoms. She made the revelation in a lengthy note chronicling her personal experience with COVID-19, including being hit with a "roller coaster" of symptoms that she treated naturally

with vitamins and healthy food.

Mrs. Trump said she is now negative and hopes to resume her duties soon.

Illinois

SPRINGFIELD — Illinois' public health director urged residents Wednesday to celebrate the holidays with limited activities and greater precautions because of the persistence of COVID-19.

Dr. Ngoze Ezike said people who are sick should not attend celebrations at all. Her cautionary note came as Gov. J.B. Pritzker announced that the percentage of COVID-19 tests coming back positive has risen across the state. The statewide positivity rate is now 4.2%.

Officials announced 2,862 new cases of the highly contagious illness Wednesday and 49 additional deaths. COVID-19 has now claimed 9,074 lives among 327,605 confirmed cases in Illinois.

Ezike suggested that holiday celebrations be planned carefully, from modes of travel to dinner-table seating arrangements.

Missouri

JEFFERSON CITY — New numbers posted on the Missouri coronavirus dashboard Wednesday after a four-day shutdown show that the state has averaged 1,861 cases a day over the past week.

The total number of cases statewide jumped Wednesday to 148,679, up from 135,651 on Oct. 7. The number of deaths jumped over that span by 184 to 2,420, according to the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services.

The dashboard has been shutdown since showing a massive spike in cases that officials blamed on a "database extract error." On Saturday, the dashboard showed a one-day increase of 5,066 new cases — nearly 3,000 more than the previous one-day high. A day later, the state announced that the new number was faulty and blamed the process of migrat-

ing data into the new system.

The agency said in a tweet that it had fixed the error and expressed thanks for the public being patient.

Nevada

U.S. diplomats and security officials privately warned the state of Nevada not to use Chinese-made coronavirus test kits donated by the United Arab Emirates over concerns about patient privacy, test accuracy and Chinese government involvement, documents obtained by The Associated Press show.

The documents illustrate how the U.S. government actively — if quietly — tried to keep the state out of a project involving the Chinese firm BGI Group, which is the world's largest genetic sequencing company and which has expanded its reach during the coronavirus pandemic.

U.S. intelligence agencies have warned that foreign powers like China could exploit samples to discover the medical history, illnesses or genetic traits of test takers, though they have not offered any public evidence.

New Mexico

SANTA FE — New Mexico health and school officials can continue to restrict in-person learning for the vast majority of young children based on county-wide coronavirus outbreaks after a federal judge denied a sweeping request for an injunction on behalf of school leaders and children from 10 New Mexico counties, mostly Republican strongholds.

In a 167-page decision, U.S. District Judge James Browning wrote that plaintiffs likely can't sue the governor and that the regulations ordered by the state are likely to be upheld.

On Sept. 8, the state gave most school districts the option to reopen, as long as they were located in counties with low rates of COVID-19 infections.

Parents in counties forced to remain closed were livid,

including the mother of a 13-year-old girl with special needs in Hobbs.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania is "at the start of the fall resurgence" of COVID-19, the state's health secretary said Wednesday, but does not plan to reimpose a stay-at-home order or shut down businesses again in response.

Wednesday marked the ninth consecutive day that Pennsylvania's daily case count surpassed 1,000, and the average daily number of new confirmed cases is up by more than 50% over the past two weeks, according to The COVID Tracking Project.

Though some of the increased caseload is due to expanded testing, the state's hospitalization and test positivity rates are also rising. That indicates increased viral spread, Dr. Rachel Levine said.

Texas

AUSTIN — While bars in much of Texas were allowed to reopen Wednesday, county judges in most of the state's most populous counties are keeping taps closed.

Gov. Greg Abbott delegated to the county leaders the option of allowing taprooms to reopen Wednesday with occupancy limited to 50% capacity.

Taverns in most of the counties in the eastern half of the state and some in the western half may reopen.

Nevertheless, with coronavirus case number escalating, county judges in most of the state's most populous counties have joined the leaders of most West Texas counties in opting out of allowing drinking establishments to reopen, according to the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission website.

Republican-led Tarrant County is the only major Texas population center to allow taps to flow. The county, with the state's third-biggest population, has the state's third-most coronavirus cases reported since March.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman who lied about cancer must repay \$27K

RI PROVIDENCE — A Rhode Island woman who received nearly \$27,000 in donations to pay for medical treatment after falsely telling family and friends she had cancer has avoided prison but must repay the money, prosecutors said Tuesday.

Alicia Pierini, 39, of Woonsocket, went so far as to shave her head and eyebrows to make it appear as if she was sick, according to a statement from the office of state Attorney General Peter Neronha.

Pierini pleaded no contest last week to obtaining money under false pretenses. She received a 10-year suspended sentence and was ordered to pay restitution.

Bail doubled for woman in abandoned-baby case

CT NEW HAVEN — A Connecticut woman charged with abandoning an 8-month-old girl in a trash bin cried during a court hearing Tuesday, as authorities continued to investigate who was responsible for burns to the baby's hands.

The girl was found alive in a bin outside a New Haven apartment complex on Monday and taken to Yale New Haven Children's Hospital, where she was reported in stable condition.

Police arrested Andiana Velez, 24, of Hamden, and said they believed she was the girl's babysitter. Velez was charged with risk of injury to a child, second-degree assault and reckless endangerment. The assault charge, authorities said, was filed because Velez stabbed the baby's 21-year-old mother, whose condition was not disclosed.

Velez was detained on \$250,000 bail, which was in-

creased to \$500,000 by a state judge during Tuesday's arraignment.

Student elected mayor of town near college

AL CAMP HILL — The new mayor of an Alabama town faces a couple of unusual challenges: namely, going to class and doing his homework.

Auburn University student Messiah Williams-Cole defeated an incumbent to be elected mayor of Camp Hill, Ala., last week. Besides operating the town of about 950 people, he's getting ready to graduate next May with a degree in interdisciplinary studies.

The 21-year-old led Mayor Ezell Woodyard-Smith by a margin of 259-156 in last Tuesday's runoff election.

Williams-Cole is a Camp Hill native, and he says he'll work out a detailed schedule to allow him to both complete his classwork and serve as mayor. The town of Camp Hill is about 20 miles northwest of Auburn.

Attempt to smoke out animal destroyed church

IA GREEN MOUNTAIN — A rural church in east-central Iowa has been destroyed in a fire sparked by an attempt to smoke out a wild animal that had gotten inside, firefighters said.

Fire crews were called to the Chapel United Methodist Church near Green Mountain around 3:30 p.m. Monday, Des Moines station WHO-TV reported. Investigators said someone tried to get rid of an animal that had gotten inside the church using a smoke bomb, which started the fire. Officials did not indicate what kind of animal had gotten inside.

It took seven fire crews and several hours to fully extin-

guish the blaze, fire officials said. The church was first established in 1867, the station reported.

Smokies seeks public's help with congestion

TN GATLINBURG — The Great Smoky Mountains National Park is turning to the public for ideas on how to reduce congestion at some of its most popular spots.

The park on the Tennessee-North Carolina border saw a record 12.5 million visitors in 2019 and has set monthly visitation records in June, July and August of this year. The result has been congested roadways, overflowing parking lots, trampled vegetation, and long lines.

Those interested in helping can register for a workshop or find more information at: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/grsmves-survey>.

Police: Man upset about game result pointed gun

KS KANSAS CITY — A Kansas City Chiefs fan who was upset about the team's loss to the Las Vegas Raiders pointed a gun at a victim in a neighborhood about 10 miles away from Arrowhead Stadium, authorities say.

Police in Kansas City, Kan., said in a tweet that officers responded to a disturbance call around 5 p.m. Sunday, after the game ended. A victim and witnesses told officers that a person, upset over the result of the Chiefs' 40-32 loss to the Raiders, pointed a gun.

"A physical fight then ensued as one of the witnesses attempted to disarm the suspect," police said. "The suspect then fled the scene."

Police recovered the gun on the scene and notified detectives.

Police: Man posed as officer, attacked woman

KY COLUMBIA — A man impersonating an officer attempted to forcibly remove a woman from her car after signaling for her to pull over, Kentucky State Police said.

State police arrested George Barton, 47, on Sunday, more than a month after the incident near Columbia. He is charged with assault, impersonating an officer, terroristic threatening and other offenses.

The woman told investigators she was driving around 10:30 p.m. on Sept. 3 when she saw blue lights flashing behind her and pulled over. She told police a male approached from an unmarked car and threw what is suspected to be ammonia in her face. The man tried to "forcibly remove" her from the car, but the woman fought back and the man went back to his car and left, the release said.

Historic hotel moved through streets of city

FL WEST PALM BEACH — A historic hotel and boarding house had to be parked overnight on a South Florida street during a move because of delays with its relocation.

Traffic had to be blocked off overnight Sunday on a street in West Palm Beach, and some light posts were temporarily removed to accommodate the relocation of the almost-century-old The Edgewater. The 4,900-square-foot hotel was moved about 1.5 miles to a historic district after a new owner of the property decided its former location would be the site of a parking lot. The Edgewater will be a bed-and-breakfast inn in its new location.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

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

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Dodgers force way back into series with rout

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — The Los Angeles Dodgers were already having a grand time before Max Muncy's big slam capped the highest-scoring inning in a major league playoff game.

That new ballpark in his home state of Texas where the Dodgers hope to keep playing right through the World Series suddenly doesn't seem too big anymore, and they are right back in the National League Championship Series after a 15-3 rout of the Atlanta Braves on Wednesday night.

Muncy's slam off Grant Dayton capped an 11-run first inning when Los Angeles benefitted from a game-starting replay challenge, hit three home runs and had nine consecutive batters reach base after two outs. The Dodgers set franchise postseason records for runs and home runs with five, cutting their NLCS deficit to 2 games to 1.

"It's pretty cool. Not too many things that are cooler than that," Muncy said. "But the biggest thing to me is our team got a 'W' and got us back on track."

Joc Pederson hit a three-run homer off starter Kyle Wright to start his four-hit night, and Edwin Rios went deep on the

next pitch. Corey Seager had a pair of RBI hits in the opening burst, then added a solo homer in the third as the Dodgers built a 15-0 lead — the first team with that many runs in the first three innings of a playoff game.

Winner Julio Urias made his first postseason start and improved to 3-0 in these playoffs, striking out five while allowing one run and three hits over five innings. He walked the first two batters but no more. Manager Dave Roberts said Clayton Kershaw will start Game 4 for the Dodgers, two nights after the three-time NL Cy Young Award winner from Dallas was scratched because of back spasms. Bryse Wilson makes his postseason debut as the third rookie right-handed starter for Atlanta in this series in what will be his first appearance since the final day of the regular season on Sept. 27.

"We still are in a good spot with four games left," Braves manager Brian Snitker said. "Like I say, for the whole team, you just turn the page and get ready to go tomorrow."

The Dodgers had left the tying run at third base in a four-run bottom of the ninth during an 8-7 loss on Tuesday night. They were the visiting team in Game 3 and sent

14 batters to the plate for seven hits, three walks and a hit batter over 32 minutes in the 29,786th half-inning in postseason history.

"It was a carryover," reigning NL MVP Cody Bellinger insisted.

"That was fun to be a part of," Pederson said. "I think some of the momentum from last night, the last inning definitely carried over and got us feeling a little bit more comfortable at the plate."

Those 15 runs over two innings came after the Braves had allowed only nine runs in their previous six games plus eight innings, a stretch that included four shutouts en route to a 7-0 postseason start.

Bellinger walked and scored in the first, led off the second with a homer and added an RBI single in the third. His long ball came right after his running, leaping catch at the center field wall to rob Ozzie Albies with two on to end the Atlanta first.

"It's not ideal how we started the series, but we feel good about ourselves," Bellinger said.

Wright gave up seven runs while facing only nine batters. He had had thrown six scoreless innings in the Game 3 NL Division Series clincher over Miami last Thursday.

Astros stave off Rays' celebration plans

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Jose Altuve and the Houston Astros are eager to match the 2004 Boston Red Sox in the history books.

Beating the Tampa Bay Rays three more times to reach the World Series won't be easy, but the Astros believe they can do it.

George Springer broke a tie with a two-run homer, Altuve also went deep and hit an RBI double, and Zack Greinke escaped a bases-loaded jam as Houston stayed alive in the AL Championship Series with a 4-3 victory Wednesday night in Game 4.

"We are very motivated," Altuve said. "We know the team we have and, yes, we want to be the second team coming back from 0-3."

Teams leading 3-0 in a best-of-seven postseason series are 37-1. The only one to rally from

an 0-3 deficit was the 2004 Red Sox, who beat the New York Yankees in the ALCS and went on to win their first World Series in 86 seasons.

Greinke pitched six effective innings for the Astros, who held a meeting before the game. Houston manager Dusty Baker said he had no idea what was brought up, but he also addressed the team.

"We've got some real leaders on this team, some dominant personalities who listen more than they talk," Baker said.

With Altuve atoning for his poor defense in this series, the Astros finally got their offense going after being pushed to the brink of a sweep. Seeking their third pennant in four seasons, they trail 3-1 going into Game 5 on Thursday afternoon.

"I'm just happy that we won the game and we're on to tomorrow," Springer said.

The Rays remain one win

from advancing to the World Series for the second time in franchise history.

Greinke, bothered by a sore arm in the Division Series against Oakland, made only one big mistake when he allowed a two-run homer to Tampa Bay rookie Randy Arozarena that tied the game at 2 in the fourth.

Given a 4-2 lead by Springer's homer in the fifth, Greinke's biggest pitch came when he struck out Mike Brosseau on a 3-2 changeup to end the sixth with the bases loaded.

After Greinke allowed consecutive singles by Manuel Margot and Austin Meadows with one out, Baker came out for a chat and decided to let the veteran right-hander continue. Arozarena struck out on a check-swing and Ji-Man Choi singled to load the bases before Greinke fanned Brosseau.

On Friday night, Brosseau

hit a go-ahead homer in the eighth inning off Aroldis Chapman of the New York Yankees that carried the Rays to a 2-1 victory in the Game 5 clincher of the ALDS.

Greinke held Tampa Bay to two runs and five hits for his first postseason win since 2015. He struck out seven and walked one.

Houston rookie Cristian Javier pitched two innings of one-hit relief before walking Choi to open the ninth. Ryan Pressly came on and got an out before Willy Adames hit an RBI double off the bottom of the left-center wall and advanced to third on a wild pitch.

Pressly got rookie Yoshi Tsutsugo on a liner to right for the save.

Rays towering right-hander Tyler Glasnow also went six innings, allowing four runs and eight hits while striking out five and walking two.

Saban, Tide AD positive for COVID-19

Associated Press

Alabama coach Nick Saban and athletic director Greg Byrne have tested positive for COVID-19, three days before the second-ranked Crimson Tide are set to face No. 3 Georgia in a clash of Southeastern Conference and national powers.

Both said their tests Wednesday morning came back positive, and Saban said in a statement that he “immediately left work and isolated at home.”

Saban, who monitored practice Wednesday from home, said he didn’t have any symptoms as of early evening. But the second-ranked Crimson Tide will almost certainly be without their iconic 68-year-old coach on the sideline when they play Georgia.

Saban said he informed the team via a Zoom call at 2 p.m. Wednesday, about an hour after he learned of the test results, and that offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian will over-

see game preparations within the football building while he works from home.

Saban said Sarkisian, a former head coach at Washington and USC, will still call the offensive plays. Saban has led Alabama to five national titles since taking over the program in 2007, and also won one at LSU.

Saban wasn’t sure how game day will go when it comes to communication with his staff, but is confident he can still lead practices and run meetings from home via Zoom calls. He communicated with a team manager when he saw a mistake in practice and wanted a play repeated.

He planned to go through his usual Thursday routine, which includes watching the offense and defense practice, work on two-point plays, and planned to preside over meetings all from home.

“I didn’t leave the country or anything,” Saban said. “I’m just right down the street. And we have this technology, so it’s

really unique.

“Now, I don’t have experience at that. But we’re going to do the best we can to keep everything as normal as possible.”

The Tide played at Mississippi last weekend, and Rebels coach Lane Kiffin said Wednesday his team had some positive tests. Saban said Alabama hasn’t “had any indication” of an outbreak within the team.

Saban said he and staffers — from coaches to secretaries — had done a good job of wearing masks around each other while in the football building. Asked about his No. 1 concern, Saban mentioned getting his players ready for the game, not his health.

“It’s a big game for them,” he said. “Our goal as coaches is always to get them in the best position they can be in to be able to have success, and we need to try to continue to do that. That would be the greatest concern that I have.

“I haven’t blocked anybody or tackled anybody, caught any passes, thrown any passes in a

game in a long, long time, so it’s still going to be up to how the players are able to execute and it’s up to us to try to get them in the best position to do that.”

The news out of Tuscaloosa was another body blow for the SEC, which had postponed two games this week already: No. 10 Florida against defending national champion LSU and Missouri-Vanderbilt.

Alabama’s head trainer Jeff Allen and medical director Jimmy Robinson said in a joint statement that Saban and Byrne were the only initial positive tests.

“All individuals who are considered high-risk contacts have been notified and will follow quarantine guidelines,” the statement said. “We will follow the SEC’s Return to Activity and Medical Guidance Task Force Protocol for testing asymptomatic positives.”

Byrne said he would “remain at home and follow all guidelines.”

Coastal Carolina upsets No. 21 Louisiana-Lafayette

Associated Press

LAFAYETTE, La. — Massimo Biscardi made a 40-yard field goal with 4 seconds left to give Coastal Carolina a 30-27 victory over No. 21 Louisiana-Lafayette on Wednesday night in Sun Belt matchup of unbeaten teams.

Freshman Grayson McCall threw two touchdown passes and ran for a score to help the Chanticleers (4-0, 2-0) beat a ranked team for the first time. The 4-0 start is their first in FBS play.

“We’ve never been in this position before,” second-year Coastal Carolina coach Jamey Chadwell said. “For us to be able to come out with a victory, in a Wednesday night game on national television, there’s tons of excitement here.”

Coastal drove 60 yards in the final 5:30 to set up Biscardi, a

three-year starter who has hit 31 of 39 field goal attempts. McCall had two completions for first downs on the drive and finished 17 of 24 for 202 yards.

“I trusted my preparation, and I had teammates that believed in me,” Biscardi said. “I kind of blacked out, I didn’t even think to be honest.”

The Ragin’ Cajuns (3-1, 2-1) rallied three times with tying touchdowns, two by Elijah Mitchell. His 1-yard burst with 12:44 left tied it at 27.

“Their quarterback played well, but we could have tackled better,” said Louisiana-Lafayette coach Billy Napier, whose team rallied from behind in each of its first three wins — the last against Georgia Southern on a last-play field goal. “They stress you on defense with everything they do, but we had our opportunities.”

Both teams scored on their

first and their last possessions of the first half, with Levi Lewis’ 12-yard pass to Jalen Williams giving Louisiana a 7-0 lead before the Chanticleers matched that drive and CJ Marable scored from a yard out.

Coastal Carolina took a 13-7 lead with 1:03 left in the half when McCall capped an 84-yard march with a 13-yard scoring pass to Marable. The Cajuns drove 77 yards in 54 seconds, with Lewis scoring on a quarterback draw with 5 seconds left.

The second half started like the first, with both teams scoring on their first possession. McCall hit Jaivon Heiligh from 6 yards out to cap an eight-minute drive, and Louisiana countered in only seven plays on Mitchell’s 9-yard run late in the third quarter. One drive later, though, Lewis’ pass was picked off by Jordan Morris at

the Louisiana 26, with the only turnover of the game setting up McCall’s 3-yard scoring run.

“Every time we scored, we felt like we had something going, but they came back and scored and we had to go and do it all over again,” Chadwell said.

The takeaway

Coastal Carolina: The nation’s fourth-highest scoring offense (44.7 points per game) didn’t match its point average, but the Chanticleers were efficient with 38:11 in time of possession and a 9 of 15 success rate on third down.

Louisiana-Lafayette: The Cajuns’ rushing attack accounted for 240 yards, but Lewis’ interception on the next-to-last play of the third quarter set up Coastal Carolina’s go-ahead touchdown.

Falcons shutter facility after positive tests

Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Atlanta Falcons shut their facility Thursday following one new positive test for COVID-19. The team remains scheduled to play at Minnesota on Sunday.

Defensive tackle Marlon Davidson was placed on the COVID-19/reserve list this week, and the addition of a second unidentified person caused the Falcons to act out of caution. All team activity will be done virtually.

“This decision was made in consultation with the NFL and medical officials,” the team said in a statement. “The health and safety of our team is our highest priority.”

The Falcons’ decision follows outbreaks with the Tennessee Titans and New England Patriots.

The Falcons (0-5) fired coach Dan Quinn and general manager Thomas Dimitroff last Sunday night, and Raheem Morris was

named interim coach.

“Right now, in this new COVID world, there’s a lot of things that come up in that world every single day,” Morris said Tuesday. “You just have to deal with that all the time.”

Davidson was the second Atlanta player to be placed on the COVID 19/reserve list in-season. Rookie cornerback A.J. Terrell missed two games before returning for last week’s home loss to Carolina.

Protocols were increased at the Falcons’ practice Wednesday.

“We definitely had different meetings today, completely virtual,” quarterback Matt Ryan said after practice. “We were all in separate rooms and in our own space. Even in practice, (shields) on our helmets. I think we are doing everything we can to keep it at bay and do the best we can under the guidelines we’ve been given.”

The NFL is attempting to play a full

schedule amid the pandemic without teams isolated in a bubble as other sports have done to protect players and staff from the virus. No games were affected through the first three weeks of the season, but the schedules of nine teams have since been disrupted.

Tennessee had the most serious outbreak with 24 tests returned, including 13 players.

The league said this week it will begin PCR testing for COVID-19 on game days beginning Sunday. The use of masks in walk-throughs is now mandatory, and only play-callers will be permitted to wear face shields in lieu of masks or gaiters on the sideline.

The updated protocols sent to teams Monday night also require anyone identified as a “high risk” close contact to be isolated and not permitted to return to the team’s facility for at least five days.

Vikings’ Mattison ready to step in if Cook’s out

Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — When Dalvin Cook hurt his groin and left for the locker room Sunday night in Seattle, the Minnesota Vikings didn’t alter their game plan.

Despite the absence of the NFL’s leading rusher, Minnesota maintained its run-heavy approach with second-year back Alexander Mattison. In the Vikings’ eyes, the strategy didn’t need to change. After all, Mattison — nicknamed “Deuce” — is nearly a clone of Cook.

“He sees the field how I see the field, and it’s crazy when we come off the field how we see things so similar,” Cook said Wednesday. “He’s just a bigger version. When he comes in, he’s trying to break the home run, too. But he knows what’s ahead of him. I do think Deuce is a similar version of me.”

Cook hobbled off after catching a short pass on the first offensive play of the second half in the 27-26 loss to the Seahawks. Cook came back for one more play, before determining he couldn’t go full speed and was done for the rest of the game.

Mattison had 12 carries for 80 yards in the fourth quarter alone. He finished with 112 yards rushing, the first 100-yard game of his career, on 20 attempts.

“We’re both that two-headed monster,” Mattison said.

Cook, who leads the NFL with 489 rushing yards and is tied with New Orleans’ Alvin Kamara with a league-best seven

touchdowns, didn’t practice on Wednesday. His status is in question for Minnesota’s game on Sunday.

“I feel better,” Cook said. “Still taking this thing day by day. As far as my Atlanta status, we’re going to take this thing day by day. Just see how it feels after treatment and everything.”

Cook has dealt with injuries throughout his career, missing 21 games in his first three seasons. The Vikings have thus made it a priority to have a steady backup.

When Latavius Murray left in free agency following the 2018 season, Minnesota selected Mattison in the third round of the 2019 draft out of Boise State. The similarities to Cook weren’t the reason Mattison was chosen. Call it a fortunate consequence.

“Alexander is a good back, a really conscientious kid,” Vikings coach Mike Zimmer said. “He works real hard and tries to learn from Dalvin as much as he can.”

Mattison grew up in San Bernardino, an often dangerous and poverty-stricken city in Southern California. His family was left homeless at times while struggling financially and his father, Darrell, was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia.

Despite the challenges, Mattison excelled athletically and academically. He had a 4.7 grade-point average and became fluent in Spanish through a dual immersion program before earning a scholarship to Boise State.

Mattison earned his nickname while

wearing No. 2 as a youth football star in San Bernardino. He wore No. 22 at Boise State. Although safety Harrison Smith owned that number in Minnesota, forcing a change to No. 25, the nickname stuck with the Vikings.

Deuce would be No. 1 on Sunday if Cook isn’t cleared. The Vikings have a bye the following week.

“Alex is a great back,” Vikings quarterback Kirk Cousins said. “I don’t feel there’s a lot of limitation there in terms of an area of the offense. He can obviously run the ball, he can pass protect, he can catch the football, he can run all the routes. He knows the game plans inside and out, so you are able to run your offense.”

Zimmer had no update on two-time Pro Bowl defensive end Danielle Hunter, who is on injured reserve with a neck injury and was recently in New York for a second medical opinion.

“Still kind of mulling his options, I think,” Zimmer said.

Zimmer has declined to give any details about Hunter’s condition this season, describing it only as a “tweak.” Hunter is in the second year of a five-year, \$72 million contract. Last season at age 25, he became the youngest player in NFL history to reach 50 career sacks.

Along with Cook, cornerback Holton Hill (foot), nose tackle Jaleel Johnson (back) and wide receiver/kick returner K.J. Osborn (hamstring) were held out of practice Wednesday.