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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US virus caseload reaches new heights with over 83K

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho— The U.S. coronavirus caseload has reached record heights with more than 83,000 infections reported in a single day, the latest ominous sign of the disease's grip on the nation, with states from Connecticut to the Rocky Mountain West reeling from the case surge.

The U.S. death toll, meanwhile, has grown to 223,995, according to the COVID-19 Dashboard published by Johns Hopkins University. The total U.S. caseload reported on the site Friday was 83,757, topping the 77,362 cases reported on July 16.

The impact is being felt in every section of the country — a lockdown starting Friday at the Oglala Sioux Tribe's reservation in South Dakota, a plea by a Florida health official for a halt to children's birthday parties, dire warnings from Utah's governor, and an increasingly desperate situation at a hospital in northern Idaho, which is running out of space for patients and considering airlifts to Seattle or Portland, Oregon.

"We've essentially shut down an entire floor of our hospital. We've had to double rooms. We've bought more hospital beds," said Dr. Robert Scoggins, a pulmonologist at the Kootenai Health hospital in Coeur d'Alene. "Our hospital is not built for a pandemic."

In the southern Idaho city of Twin Falls, St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center said it would no longer accept children because it is overwhelmed with coronavirus patients. Except

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WHO director-general

for newborns, all under age 18 will be sent 128 miles away in Boise.

Among those in northern Idaho joining Scoggins at a meeting of Idaho's Panhandle Health District was board member Walk Kirby.

"People are dying, they're going to keep dying and catching this stuff," Kirby said. "How many people won't wear a mask? The same people that won't get vaccinated for it."

Utah's Gov. Gary Herbert proclaimed Friday to be "a record day for Utah — but not a good one" as COVID-19 cases reached an all-time high for the state.

"Up until now, our hospitals have been able to provide good care to all COVID and non-COVID patients who need it," he said. "But today we stand on the brink. If Utahans do not take serious steps to limit group gatherings and wear masks, our healthcare providers will not have the ability to provide quality care for everyone who needs it."

By public health order, masks are required in 21 counties, said Herbert, urging Utah residents to wear one whenever they are around someone outside their immediate household.

The seven-day rolling aver-

age for new daily COVID-19 cases in the U.S. surpassed 61,140 Thursday, compared with 44,647 two weeks ago. The record was reached July 22 when the rolling average was 67,293 in the midst of a summer outbreak driven largely by surges of the virus in Florida, Texas, Arizona and California.

The U.S. surge mirrors a similarly widespread spike in Europe, where Rome, Paris and other major cities are rein-ing in nightlife as part of the increasingly drastic measures undertaken to slow the spread of the pandemic. French authorities said the country had recorded over 1 million confirmed coronavirus cases since the start of the pandemic, becoming the second country in Western Europe after Spain to reach that number.

The head of the World Health Organization warned that countries in the Northern Hemisphere are at a "critical juncture" as cases and deaths continue to rise.

"The next few months are going to be very tough and some countries are on a dangerous track," said WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at a press briefing on Friday.

2 aboard Navy plane killed in Ala. crash

Associated Press

FOLEY, Ala. — A U.S. Navy training plane that took off from Florida crashed Friday in an Alabama residential neighborhood near the Gulf Coast, killing both people in the plane, authorities said.

Zach Harrell, a spokesman for Commander, Naval Air Forces, said both people in the T-6B Texan II training plane died, but they weren't immediately releasing their names. No injuries were reported on the ground.

Foley Fire Chief Joey Darby said responders encountered a "large volume of fire" with a home and several cars engulfed in flames. Firefighters were able to make "a quick stop on the fire," the chief told local news outlets.

The crash occurred southeast of Mobile, near the city of Foley and the town of Magnolia Springs. Darby called the neighborhood a "heavily populated" residential area. No firefighters were injured, he added.

The plane had flown out of Naval Air Station Whiting Field, about 30 miles northeast of Pensacola, Florida, Navy spokeswoman Julie Ziegenhorn said.

The U.S. Department of Defense and the Navy were set to handle the investigation, the Baldwin County Sheriff's Office tweeted.

US slams Turkey for weapon test

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration on Friday slammed Turkey for taking a new step toward fielding a Russian-made air defense weapon. The U.S. complaint marked a deepening rift that threatens the future of a security relationship that has been central to the NATO military alliance for seven decades.

After Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan confirmed that his country had tested the S-400 air defense system and brushed off American complaints, saying, “We aren’t going to ask America,” the Pentagon hit back.

“The U.S. Department of Defense condemns in the strongest possible terms Turkey’s October 16 test of the S-400 air defense system,” the top Pentagon spokesman, Jonathan Hoffman, said in a statement. “We have been clear and unwavering in our position: an operational S-400 system is not consistent with Turkey’s commitments as a U.S. and NATO ally.”

The State Department separately called Turkey’s test unacceptable and a “clear step in the wrong direction.”

“The United States has been clear on our expectation that the S-400 system should not be operationalized,” State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said in a statement. “We have also been clear on the potential serious consequences for our security relationship if Turkey activates the system.”

For months, the administration has warned Ankara that it risks U.S. sanctions under the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act if the S-400 system is activated.

On a technical level, the U.S. government’s concern is that the S-400 could be used by Turkey to gather data on the capabilities of the American-made F-35 stealth fighter jet and that the information could end up in Russian hands. More broadly, Washington sees this weapon purchase as a slap at NATO and a violation of allies’ commitment to move away from Russian defense equipment.

Senate GOP marches forward on Barrett

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate is poised for a rare weekend session as Republicans race to put Amy Coney Barrett on the Supreme Court and cement a conservative majority before Election Day despite Democratic efforts to stall President Donald Trump’s nominee.

Democrats mounted time-consuming procedural hurdles Friday, but the party has no realistic chance of stopping Barrett’s advance in the Republican-controlled chamber. Barrett, a federal appeals court judge, is expected to be confirmed Monday and quickly join the court.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York warned Republicans that they were making a “colossal and historic mistake.”

Republicans appeared unmoved. In a lengthy speech, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell praised Barrett as an “extraordinary” nominee and defended her quick confirmation. “We will give this nominee the vote she deserves no later than Monday,” he said.

Barrett, 48, presented herself in public testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee

as a neutral arbiter of cases on abortion, the Affordable Care Act and presidential power — issues soon confronting the court. At one point she suggested, “It’s not the law of Amy.”

But Barrett’s past writings against abortion and a ruling on the Obama-era health care law show a deeply conservative thinker.

The fast-track confirmation process is like none other in U.S. history so close to a presidential election.

Schumer called it the “least legitimate process in the country’s history” as he forced procedural steps, including an unusual private Senate session, in hopes of changing Republicans’ minds.

But Republicans quickly convened, then ended, the closed-door meeting, pushing forward. Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, dismissed the stall tactics as “frivolous.”

At the start of Trump’s presidency, McConnell engineered a Senate rules change to allow confirmation by a majority of the 100 senators, rather than the 60-vote threshold traditionally needed to advance high court nominees over objections. With a 53-47 GOP majority, Barrett’s confirmation is almost certain.

Fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh goes on despite US mediation

Associated Press

STEPANAKERT, Nagorno-Karabakh — Rocket and artillery barrage hit residential areas Saturday hours after the United States hosted top diplomats from Armenia and Azerbaijan for talks on settling their decadeslong conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The heavy shelling forced residents of Stepanakert, the regional capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, into shelters, as emergency teams rushed to extinguish fires.

Nagorno-Karabakh authorities said other towns in the region were also targeted by Azerbaijani artillery fire. There was no immediate information about casualties.

Officials in Azerbaijan claimed that the

town of Terter and areas in the Gubadli region came under Armenian shelling early Saturday, killing a teenager. They said that another 13-year-old boy died Saturday of wounds he received in an earlier shelling of Ganja, Azerbaijan’s second-largest city.

Nagorno-Karabakh lies within Azerbaijan but has been under the control of ethnic Armenian forces backed by Armenia since a war there ended in 1994. The current fighting that started Sept. 27 marks the worst escalation in the conflict since the war’s end.

After two failed attempts by Russia to broker a truce, the U.S. waded onto the scene on Friday, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo hosting the Armenian and

Azerbaijan foreign ministers for separate talks.

“Both must implement a ceasefire and return to substantive negotiations,” Pompeo said in a tweet after the negotiations.

According to Nagorno-Karabakh officials, 927 of their troops have been killed, and 37 civilians also have died. Azerbaijan hasn’t disclosed its military losses, but said that over 60 civilians were killed and about 300 were wounded.

Russia, the United States and France have co-chaired the so-called Minsk Group set up by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to mediate in the conflict, but they haven’t scored any progress after nearly three decades.

Calif. utility may cut power to 1M Sunday

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Pacific Gas & Electric may cut power to over 1 million people on Sunday to prevent the chance of sparking wildfires as extreme fire weather returns to the region, the utility announced Friday.

The nation's largest utility said it could black out customers in 38 counties — including most of the San Francisco Bay Area — as weather forecasts called for a return of bone-dry, gusty weather that carries the threat of downing or fouling power lines or other equipment that in recent years have been blamed for igniting massive and deadly blazes in central

and Northern California.

The safety shutoffs were expected to begin as early as Sunday morning and last into Tuesday, affecting 466,000 homes and businesses, or more than 1 million residents assuming between two and three people per home or business customer.

Cuts are predicted to encompass parts of the Sacramento Valley, the northern and central Sierra Nevada, upper elevations of the San Francisco Bay Area, the Santa Cruz Mountains, the Central Coast and portions of southern Kern County.

The projected shutoffs include 19,000 customers in parts of Butte County, where a 2018 blaze ignited by PG&E equip-

ment destroyed much of the town of Paradise and killed 85 people.

Forecasts call for the “the driest humidity levels and the strongest winds of the wildfire season thus far,” a PG&E statement said.

The National Weather Service issued red flag warnings for many areas, predicting winds of 35 mph or higher in San Francisco and lower elevations and up to 70 mph in some mountains. The concern is that any spark could be blown into flames sweeping through tinder-dry brush and forestland.

“On a scale of 1 to 10, this event is a 9,” Craig Clements, director of San Jose State University's Fire Weather Lab,

told the Bay Area News Group. “Historically our biggest fires are in October. We are in a critical period.”

The National Weather Service said the conditions could equal those during devastating fires in California's wind country in 2017 and last year's Kincaid Fire.

Fire officials said PG&E transmission lines sparked that Sonoma County fire last October, which destroyed hundreds of homes and caused nearly 100,000 people to flee.

The public safety power shutoff, or PSPS, would be the fifth this year, including one that began Wednesday and was scheduled to end late Friday.

Scientists find 1st US ‘murder hornets’ nest

Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — Scientists in Washington state have discovered the first nest of so-called murder hornets in the United States and plan to wipe it out Saturday to protect native honeybees, officials said.

Workers with the state Agriculture Department spent weeks searching, trapping and using dental floss to tie track-

ing devices to Asian giant hornets, which can deliver painful stings to people and spit venom but are the biggest threat to honeybees that farmers depend on to pollinate crops.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we did it,” agency spokeswoman Karla Salp said at a virtual briefing. Bad weather delayed plans Friday to destroy the nest found in Blaine, a city north of

Seattle.

The nest is about the size of a basketball and contains an estimated 100 to 200 hornets, according to scientists, who suspected it was in the area ever since the invasive insects began appearing late last year. Officials have said it's not known how they arrived in North America.

Despite their nickname and

the hype that has stirred fears in an already bleak year, the world's largest hornets kill at most a few dozen people a year in Asian countries, and experts say it is probably far less. Meanwhile, hornets, wasps and bees typically found in the United States kill an average of 62 people a year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said.

Trump: Sudan, Israel will start to normalize ties

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump announced Friday that Sudan will start to normalize ties with Israel, making it the third Arab state to do so as part of U.S.-brokered deals in the runup to Election Day.

The announcement came after the North African nation agreed to put \$335 million in an escrow account to be used to compensate American victims of terror attacks. The attacks include the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania by the al-Qaida network while its leader,

Osama bin Laden, was living in Sudan. In exchange, Trump notified Congress on Friday of his intent to remove Sudan from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism.

It was foreign policy achievement for Trump just 11 days before Election Day. Previously, the Trump administration engineered diplomatic pacts between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain — the first since Jordan recognized Israel in the 1990s and Egypt in the 1970s.

Trump said at least five other countries want to come into the deal, which is collectively

called the Abraham Accords.

The new recognitions of Israel unify Arab nations around their common enemy, Iran. They also upend the traditional Arab strategy of refusing to normalize relations with Israel before an independent Palestinian state is created.

The Palestinians say the recognitions amount to betrayal.

Israel said the recognitions signal that the Palestinians have lost their “veto” over regional peace efforts.

“This is one of the great days in the history of Sudan,” Trump said, adding that Israel and Sudan have been in a state

of hostilities for decades, even if they had not been in direct conflict.

In a statement released in Jerusalem, Netanyahu noted that in 1967, Khartoum hosted a conference where the Arab League called for no recognition, negotiations or peace with Israel.

He said Israeli and Sudanese teams will meet soon to discuss cooperation in agriculture, trade and other areas. Sudan also is opening its skies to Israeli flights, which will shorten trips to Africa and South America, he said.

System flaw leads to faulty virus data

Associated Press

O'FALLON, Mo. — With the number of coronavirus patients requiring hospitalization rising at alarming levels, Missouri and perhaps a handful of other states are unable to post accurate data on COVID-19 dashboards because of a flaw in the federal reporting system.

Since Tuesday, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Service's coronavirus dashboard has posted a message that the total number of patients hospitalized for COVID-19 has been underreported since Oct. 17. The note blamed "challenges entering data" to the portal used by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for collecting daily hospitalizations around the country.

It wasn't immediately clear on Friday how many states are impacted since some states rely on their own hospitalization counts, not HHS data collection. HHS did not immediately respond to phone and email messages seeking comment.

But The COVID Tracking Project said in a blog post that it has "identified five other states with anomalies in their hospitalization figures" that could be tied to the HHS reporting problem.

The project noted that the number of reported intensive care unit patients in Kansas had decreased from 80 to one without explanation. It said Wisconsin's hospitalization figures stayed unexpectedly flat while other indicators worsened. And it said Georgia, Alabama, and Florida reported only partial updates to hospitalization data.

Florida

TAMPA — A Florida man who received more than \$1.9 million in coronavirus relief funds is accused of laundering most of the money through a fake business and purchasing a luxury car and a pickup truck, federal prosecutors said.

Keith William Nicoletta, 48, of Dade City, was arrested earlier this week and charged with

bank fraud and illegal monetary transactions, according to the U.S. attorney's office in Tampa. He faces up to 40 years in federal prison.

Prosecutors accuse Nicoletta of falsely claiming on a loan application that he had a scrap metal business with 69 employees and a monthly payroll of more than \$760,000.

Once the emergency loan was secured, Nicoletta transferred the money between various accounts and withdrew more than \$100,000 in cash, officials said. Nicoletta then purchased a 2020 Mercedes and a 2020 special edition Ford F-250 pickup. He also wired approximately \$537,000 to a property management company in South Florida. None of the money was used for payroll.

Illinois

SPRINGFIELD — Illinois' public health director on Friday again pleaded with residents to wear face coverings to slow the spread of the coronavirus, breaking at one point and pausing to compose herself after reporting the day's grim COVID-19 statistics.

As the number of cases rise to levels rivaling the nightmare spring when hospitals scrambled for beds to treat the sick, Dr. Ngoze Ezike rallied residents to resist "COVID fatigue" by thinking of health care and other essential workers who cannot avoid the public on a daily basis.

"If you're talking about COVID fatigue from having to keep wearing a mask, think about the COVID fatigue for health care workers ... trying to fight for people's lives," Ezike said.

Michigan

EAST LANSING — Michigan high school winter sports will start on time in November.

Face coverings are required for athletes practicing and competing in basketball, competitive cheer, ice hockey and wrestling, the Michigan High School Athletic Association

said Friday.

They are not required for athletes in bowling, gymnastics, skiing and swimming unless the players are on the sideline and not actively participating.

The state health department reported 1,826 new confirmed coronavirus cases Friday and 18 deaths.

Montana

KALISPELL — State and county health officials have started cracking down on businesses that aren't enforcing Gov. Steve Bullock's mask mandate, which was put in place in July to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services sought court approval in Flathead County to force four businesses to come into compliance with the mandate, the Flathead Beacon reported Friday.

The state is seeking temporary restraining orders against Sykes Diner and Mercantile in Kalispell, Remington Bar and Casino in Whitefish, Your Lucky Turn Tavern in Bigfork and Ferndale Market.

The governor's mandate requires face coverings to be worn in all indoor spaces open to the public in counties that have four or more current cases of COVID-19.

North Dakota

BISMARCK — National Guard soldiers have helped to notify 800 people who tested positive for COVID-19 but initially weren't told, officials said.

The notification backlog, which was due to a recent sharp increase in coronavirus cases, was resolved Thursday largely through shifting the role of 50 North Dakota National Guard soldiers, health officials said.

The soldiers had been informing people they may have been exposed to COVID-19 and should monitor their health for signs and symptoms of the virus. On Tuesday, health officials announced the soldiers

would instead be notifying those who test positive for the virus.

The North Dakota Department of Health expects the change in contact tracing to be temporary.

Utah

SALT LAKE CITY — Utah hit another ominous record Friday by tallying the highest number of confirmed coronavirus cases in a single day as the state struggles to slow a month-long surge of COVID-19 that is filling intensive care beds at hospitals.

After the state reported 1,960 confirmed cases, Gov. Gary Herbert warned in a statement that the state is "on the brink," and once again pleaded with people to adhere to mask mandates in place in 21 of the state's 29 counties. The Republican governor said people should wear masks anytime they are with people besides their immediate family, even if it's extended family or friends.

Capacity at the state's intensive care units reached 76%, with more people hospitalized this week for COVID-19 than at any other time during the pandemic, state figures show.

Wisconsin

MADISON — A Wisconsin appeals court on Friday temporarily blocked Gov. Tony Evers' restrictions on indoor public gatherings pending appeal, dealing the Democratic governor a setback in his efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

The ruling from the 3rd District Court of Appeals follows Evers' administration issuing an emergency order Oct. 6. The directive limited indoor public gatherings to 25% of a building or room's capacity or 10 people in places without an occupancy limit.

The order also came as COVID-19 cases surged in Wisconsin, where the state this week was among the worst in the nation in daily new cases per capita and hospitals near capacity.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Agents discover new tunnel near US border

AZ TUCSON — A new hand-dug tunnel was found near the U.S. border in Nogales.

Tucson Sector agents said the tunnel was discovered by video surveillance.

Agents located the tunnel's 2-foot-by-2-foot exit about a half-mile west of the DeConcini Port of Entry and about three feet north of the border.

Mexican authorities located the tunnel's entrance in the floor of an existing drainage system in Mexico.

Completed tunnels are used by smugglers to get narcotics and immigrants across the border, according to authorities.

Festival files complaint against ticket vendor

WI JANESVILLE — Organizers of a Wisconsin winter beer festival known as FlannelFest filed complaints in two states against an online ticket vendor for failing to turn over money from ticket sales.

The chamber of commerce group in Janesville said third-party vendor Brown Paper Tickets owes \$20,000 for online ticket sales to the festival held earlier this year.

John Fugate, board president of Downtown Janesville Inc., said complaints were filed with the Wisconsin attorney general and the attorney general in Washington state, where Brown Paper Tickets operates.

Officials fine woman for raising deer at home

CO COLORADO SPRINGS — Wildlife officials in Colorado said a woman was fined more than \$1,000 after they believe she

fed and raised a young deer that later gored a woman.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife issued two citations to Tynette Housley, 73, who allegedly took a day-old fawn into her home and raised the deer for a year before it attacked a woman walking her dog, The Gazette reported.

The young deer was euthanized after it knocked a woman down and gored her, officials said.

Authorities said she was hospitalized for serious lacerations to her head, cheek and legs.

Woman paroled 12 years after ex's murder

NY NEW YORK — A New York woman nicknamed "Black Widow" for the bespoke funereal clothes she wore at the trial for her estranged husband's killing will be paroled next month after 12 years behind bars.

Barbara Kogan, 77, pleaded guilty to manslaughter and other charges in 2010 in relation to the contract killing of real estate tycoon George Kogan, who was shot three times outside his girlfriend's Upper East Side apartment in 1990.

In a July 7 parole hearing, Kogan claimed to never have planned to collect her husband's \$4 million life insurance policy, the New York Post reported.

Man denies attempting to abduct 11-year-old

MA WORCESTER — A Massachusetts man charged with trying to abduct a girl, 11, pleaded not guilty and was being held on a \$1,000 bail.

Andrew Merriam, 51, of Hudson, was arraigned on charges of enticing a child, attempting to commit a crime, and assault and battery.

Merriam approached the girl just before 8 p.m. and asked her if she wanted to see his dog, police said in a statement.

He grabbed the girl by the arm and prevented her from escaping until she kicked him and ran into a nearby store, prosecutors said. She was not hurt.

His attorney said his client "categorically denies the allegations" and said he had just a brief, verbal exchange with the girl.

Man arrested in theft, slaughter of horse

FL PALMETTO — A Florida man was arrested in the theft and slaughter of a horse last year, officials said.

Eladio Garcia-Gasca, 50, was arrested at his North St. Petersburg home and charged with grand theft and animal cruelty, according to a Manatee County Sheriff's Office news release.

In December 2019, someone forced their way through a locked gate in a rural area of Manatee County and removed the horse from its stall, officials said. When the deputies and the owner later searched the surrounding area, they found the animal dead, with most of its meat removed.

Surveillance video linked Garcia-Gasca to the crime, officials said.

Man walking through store with rifle arrested

MI ROYAL OAK TOWNSHIP — A Detroit man was arrested after customers in a suburban grocery store told police he had walked around inside the store with a rifle.

Touri Goodwin was arraigned on carrying a concealed weapon, being a felon in possession of a firearm and other charges, according to The Detroit News.

State police were called to the store and saw a man with a short-barreled rifle slung around his neck inside a vehicle outside the store.

The man told officers he also had a handgun beneath his jacket. Police seized the handgun and rifle. Both were loaded with ammunition.

Police arrest carjacker of car with infant inside

CA LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles police arrested a carjacking suspect who drove away with a woman and her infant grandson in the vehicle, officials said.

The grandmother, 81, and the child were waiting in the parked but running car while the baby's mother ran an errand near downtown LA, police said.

The suspect jumped into the driver's seat and drove off, said police Capt. T. Scott Harrelson.

The suspect led officers on a "slow-speed pursuit" that ended when officers deployed a spike strip, according to a police news release.

13 horses dead after tractor-trailer tips over

MO WASHINGTON — Thirteen horses are dead and others were injured after a traffic accident in eastern Missouri.

KMOV-TV reported that the accident happened in Franklin County when a tractor-trailer carrying 29 horses tipped over on Interstate 44. The cause of the accident remained under investigation.

The surviving horses were taken to Longmeadow Rescue Ranch in Union. The truck driver was not seriously hurt.

From wire reports

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and Military News

Garoppolo goes against former team

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Jimmy Garoppolo's early NFL education came going up against Bill Belichick's complicated defense each day in practice with the New England Patriots.

That work helped Garoppolo develop from a raw prospect coming out of Eastern Illinois into an accomplished quarterback in the NFL, even if it took leaving New England to do it.

Now Garoppolo gets his first chance to go up against his former coach and team since being traded away to San Francisco nearly three years ago when the 49ers visit the Patriots on Sunday.

"It set me up for everything here, made the transition a lot easier," Garoppolo said about the work he did with the Patriots. "Initially I could remember the first OTAs and training camp. It was rough going from college to the NFL. That's why when you see these guys come in and start right away, it's impressive."

Garoppolo said he had to learn everything from how to play from under center instead of the shotgun to identifying fronts and coverages when he got to the NFL as Tom Brady's backup after being drafted in

the second round in 2014.

He said he owes much of his success to that time, appreciating everything Belichick taught him.

"He was just very honest," Garoppolo said. "Really never beat around the bush. He's very black and white with everything they did. That's kind of how I am. I really appreciate that from him. Whether it was my first day there or when I got traded, he always shot me straight and I think just when you're talking about just man to man, that's all you could really ask for at the end of the day."

Garoppolo never got much of a chance to play in New England with Brady entrenched as the starter. He started two games to open the 2016 season when Brady was suspended but got hurt in the second game and missed an opportunity to start the final two games.

He showed enough in those two starts to become a hot commodity on the trade market. The Patriots finally gave him up midway through the 2017 season, knowing he could become a free agent the following offseason and Brady was still playing at a high level.

"Everybody here had a lot of confidence in him," Belichick said. "It's one of those situa-

tions where you're not able to keep all the players, based on the system that's set up, which is understandable. I'm glad that it's worked out for him and San Francisco. I hope it doesn't work out on Sunday. But otherwise, I'm happy he has the opportunity to play for a great coach and a great organization and play on a great team. I think he deserves that. He certainly worked hard and earned it, and I'm happy for him and his family."

Garoppolo's addition helped spark a turnaround in San Francisco for a Niners team that lost its first nine games with Kyle Shanahan as coach. Garoppolo took over the starting role late in the 2017 season and won all five starts to finish a 6-10 season.

His ascension got derailed the following year when he went down with a season-ending knee injury in Week 3, but recovered to play well enough last season to help San Francisco win 13 games and make it to the Super Bowl.

But a poor fourth quarter in that loss to the Chiefs left questions about whether he was the long-term answer in San Francisco that only grew louder when he got pulled at halftime two weeks ago after throwing

interceptions on back-to-back drives on a bum ankle in a 43-17 loss to Miami.

He bounced back last week by throwing three TD passes in the first half of a 24-16 win over the Rams.

"I think that's one of the most impressive things about Jimmy," Shanahan said. "When you think the pressure might get to him and stuff, which you would think it does to everybody, it is human nature and it's a very tough position. Whether you play good or bad, if the result's not good, you're going to get questioned a lot and people are going to point the finger at a quarterback a lot. The tough game that our whole team had versus Miami with him getting taken out there in that game. Yeah, it was tough, but the way he came into work on Monday, you couldn't tell. He's very mentally strong."

That will come in handy on Sunday when he returns to his old home to face his former team and a defensive-minded coach known for making things as tough as possible on opposing quarterbacks.

"It's an exciting week," he said. "Get to go back to where it all started for me in my NFL career. ... Exciting week and I can't wait for Sunday."

Saints without key WRs for game against Panthers

Associated Press

METAIRIE, La. — New Orleans Saints receiver Emmanuel Sanders has tested positive for COVID-19 and Michael Thomas remained unable to practice on Friday because of a recent hamstring injury. Neither will be able to play Sunday against Carolina.

Thomas, the 2019 AP Offensive Player of the Year after setting an NFL record with 149 catches in a season, was listed as out on the Saints' final injury report of the week. He has not played since the season opener, when he caught three passes for 17 yards before spraining

his ankle when running back Latavius Murray was tackled into the back of the star receiver's lower legs.

He was on schedule to return from the ankle injury in Week 5, only to be benched because of an outburst at practice in which he punched defensive back C.J. Gardner-Johnson. His punishment was lifted during the Saints' Week 6 bye, but now he has a new lower-body injury, the severity of which coach Sean Payton did not want to discuss.

"I'm not going to get into details but it's something he's working through and we'll

leave it at that," Payton said.

Sanders had a career-high 12 catches for 122 yards in New Orleans' last game, a 30-27 triumph over the Los Angeles Chargers in Week 5. He has caught 26 passes for 304 yards and two touchdowns this season for the Saints (3-2).

Sanders practiced on Thursday but was not feeling well afterward and was immediately tested for COVID-19.

When Sanders' test came back positive, Payton said a combination of players and coaches totaling about 20 people who might have been close to Sanders were tested and all

were negative.

Payton said the club has already determined that there was no issue with its coronavirus protocols

"Protocols have been outstanding," Payton said, adding that Sanders "got this at home. He knows exactly how he got it and I'll leave it at that."

Despite being without arguably two of the best receivers on the club, Payton said he feels "good" about the Saints' depth at wide receiver.

"A lot of different guys working at different positions, and we had good work today," Payton said.

Dodgers take 2-1 lead in World Series

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Walker Buehler was dominant for Los Angeles. Just like Orel Hershiser during the Dodgers' last title run.

Buehler struck out 10 in six innings in a pulsating performance, and Los Angeles beat the Tampa Bay Rays 6-2 on Friday night for a 2-1 World Series lead.

Justin Turner homered in the first inning against a surprisingly hittable Charlie Morton, who was chased in the fifth.

Austin Barnes, the Dodgers' No. 9 hitter and catcher, added a sixth-inning homer against John Curtiss and became just the second player to drive in runs with both a homer and a sacrifice bunt in the same Series game.

Los Angeles overwhelmed Tampa Bay in all phases, leaving the Rays' scuffling offense with a .206 average and 11 runs in the Series.

Julio Urias, a hard-throwing Mexican left-hander in a Dodgers lineage dating to Fernando Valenzuela, started Game 4 on Saturday night for the Dodgers, while the Rays strung together several relievers that included Ryan Yarbrough.

Thirty-eight of 59 previous teams that won Game 3 for a 2-1 lead went on to take the title.

Justin Turner and Austin Barnes homered for the Dodgers, who have outhomered the Rays 7-4 in the Series and opponents 25-16 in the postseason. Barnes also drove in a run with a squeeze, the second player with RBIs on a bunt and home run in a Series game behind Hector Lopez of the New York Yankees in Game 5 in 1961.

Steely-eyed like Hershiser, who won MVP honors of the 1988 Series, Buehler has supplanted Clayton Kershaw as the Dodgers' ace. He allowed three of Tampa Bay's four hits and walked one.

The 26-year-old right-hander

has allowed one run in 13 Series innings that include seven scoreless in Game 3 against Boston two years ago. He improved to 2-0 with a 1.80 ERA in four postseason starts that include the win over Atlanta in Game 6 of the NL Championship Series.

"I've taken the failures that I've had and tried to learn from them a little bit," Buehler said. "Obviously our team gave me a cushion early so I could be aggressive."

He started 15 of 21 batters with strikes and threw strikes on 67 of 93 pitches. Buehler didn't allow a hit until Manuel Margot's one-out double in the fifth. Willy Adames then drove in Margot with another double.

Tampa Bay's only other hit off him was Austin Meadows' leadoff single in the sixth.

"You can see the fastball just pop through the zone," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "Other than a few breaking

balls here or there, it was very much a there-it-is, hit-it approach. You totally understand and appreciate why he's so talented. He's got a really special fastball that gets on hitters and commands it well."

Rays batters were kept off balance by his mix of 59 four-seam fastballs, 14 knuckle-curves, 12 sliders and eight cut fastballs. He became the first pitcher in the Series with 10 or more strikeouts in six or fewer innings, part of analytic changes in modern baseball that have led to shorter starter outings in an era of vastly increased whiffs.

"That might have been the best I've ever seen him," Barnes said.

Blake Treinen and Brusdar Graterol followed with a scoreless inning apiece. Kenley Jansen gave up Randy Arozarena's record-tying eighth homer of the postseason before closing out the four-hitter.

No. 14 Wisconsin has easy time in Big Ten opener

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Wisconsin's Graham Mertz gave a star-making performance on the opening night of the Big Ten's pandemic-delayed season.

Mertz threw five touchdown passes to match the Wisconsin record in a commanding first career start and the No. 14 Badgers beat Illinois 45-7 on Friday night.

"The kid's definitely smooth," said tight end Jake Ferguson, who caught seven passes for 72 yards and three touchdowns. "He was smiling cheek to cheek after the first touchdown. He knew, and everybody in that huddle knew, we were rolling. It's just awesome to see that out of him."

Mertz set a school record for completion percentage on 20-for-21 passing, finishing with 248 yards. His lone incomple- tion was a pass that running back Garrett Groshek dropped

midway through the third quarter.

"It was definitely fun," Mertz said.

The redshirt freshman delivered a buzzworthy performance during the Big Ten's long-awaited opening night. The Big Ten announced Aug. 11 that it would postpone all fall sports until the spring due to the coronavirus pandemic, then reversed itself Sept. 16 by saying it would begin the season in mid-October.

While most other conferences began playing last month in front of partially filled stadiums, Wisconsin had cutouts in the stands and piped-in crowd noise Friday as it began its nine-game schedule.

The unusual circumstances meant there were no fans jumping around when Wisconsin continued its tradition of playing House of Pain's "Jump Around" before the fourth quarter, and there were no specta-

tors cheering on Mertz during his record performance.

But his prime-time outburst still earned raves on social media from a wide range of players, including Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes and former Wisconsin star J.J. Watt.

"I haven't checked my phone yet," Mertz said. "It's great to hear from those guys and it means a ton, but I'm just happy the guys in the locker room are pumped right now. We've got to keep building on that."

Mertz became the first-team quarterback after returning starter Jack Coan underwent foot surgery on Oct. 7, leaving him out indefinitely.

He wasted no time making the most of his opportunity. The only previous Wisconsin quarterbacks to throw five touchdown passes in a game are Darrell Bevell against Nevada in 1993 and Jim Sorgi against Michigan State in 2003.

"I thought he had good poise," Wisconsin coach Paul Chryst said. "I thought he saw the field well. You never know quite how someone's going to react in their first start, but I thought he was himself."

Mertz's brilliant night helped Wisconsin gain revenge after losing 24-23 to 30½-point underdog Illinois last year in one of the 2019 season's biggest upsets. The Badgers put this one out of reach by halftime.

"I thought I had the team more ready, more prepared to play than we showed out there tonight," Illinois coach Lovie Smith said. "We will play better than that. We're a better football team than that."

After Illinois fumbled the ball away on the game's second play from scrimmage, Mertz hit fullback Mason Stokke for a 10-yard touchdown pass. He found Ferguson wide-open in the back of the end zone for a 5-yard score to make it 14-0.

Championship stakes for IndyCar finale

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Scott Dixon has controlled IndyCar's title race since the start of this disrupted start-and-stop season. Reigning champion Josef Newgarden remained undeterred and slowed Dixon's runaway rout.

The American has whittled 85 points off of Dixon's lead and turned Sunday's season finale into a championship-deciding event.

Newgarden is now 32 points behind Dixon in a bid to win back-to-back titles and IndyCar found 19,872 scoring scenarios that could determine the champion when the checkered flag falls in downtown St. Petersburg.

"It was like 20,000 scenarios — 1% of the scenarios means we can win the championship," Newgarden said. "You're saying there's a chance and that's all we need."

Dixon seemed to be cruising toward a sixth title when the New Zealander opened the abbreviated season with three consecutive wins. Dixon is considered the best of his generation, a driver who rarely makes

mistakes, avoids risky racing situations and can protect a points lead.

But then Dixon did err during a doubleheader at Mid-Ohio last month. He held a 96-point lead when that weekend opened, but a subpar performance in the first race followed by a "rookie mistake" spin the next day gave Newgarden an opening.

Dixon's lead shrunk to 40 points, a slide that ended all talk of a coronation before the season finale.

"Had I not spun, I think it would have been a different scenario going into the last race," Dixon said.

Newgarden, with three wins this season, is now looming in Dixon's rearview mirror. But even with the astronomical amount of scoring possibilities, Newgarden will have to be nearly perfect to win a third title.

Dixon needs only to finish ninth or better to win the title, regardless if Newgarden sweeps every point available and wins from the pole.

He feels no pressure to complete a flawless weekend.

"I'm surprised we're here. It almost

makes it more disappointing looking at the year now that we've clawed back to this point," Newgarden said. "We were in such a deficit; there was such a hill. We've reduced the hill, without a doubt, but it's still a mountain to climb. It's going to be a very hard task for us to try to win the championship."

The IndyCar season was 48 hours away from its March 17 season-opening race when sports shut down during the pandemic, decimating the original 17-race schedule. IndyCar lost stops in seven different cities and new series owner Roger Penske cobbled together a 14-race season full of doubleheaders and four races at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

IndyCar put St. Pete back on the schedule as the finale, seven months after the teams sat idle all over the city awaiting a decision, and the new race date seemed tenuous until about a month ago. But state and city officials signed off on this weekend while also authorizing 20,000 spectators, giving St. Pete the largest IndyCar crowd this season.

Briefly

Source: WR Brown agrees to join Bucs

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Suspended receiver Antonio Brown has agreed to return to the NFL with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on a one-year deal, according to a person with knowledge of the move.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity Saturday because the contract had not been completed.

The addition of the volatile seven-time Pro Bowl selection bolsters an already formidable arsenal of playmakers for Tom Brady.

Brown, who's nearing the end of an eight-game suspension for violating the league's personal conduct policy, is eligible to return in Week 9, when the first-place Bucs (4-2) host the NFC South rival New Orleans Saints.

Brown is the latest high-profile addition around Brady, who signed with Tampa Bay in free

agency this year after a historic 20-season run in New England that included nine Super Bowl appearances and six titles.

Tight end Rob Gronkowski and running backs Leonard Fournette and LeSean McCoy have also joined Brady in Tampa Bay, which hasn't made the playoffs since 2007.

Brown is reuniting with the 43-year-old quarterback after playing one game with Brady during a brief stint with the Patriots in September 2019.

Fury says he'll fight in London in December

LONDON — WBC world heavyweight champion Tyson Fury said Saturday that he plans to fight in London on Dec. 5, but his opponent is unknown.

"I'd just like to announce I'm definitely fighting December the 5th in London. Opponent to be announced very, very soon,"

Fury said in a video message posted on his social media accounts. "Just working on some opponents. Let you all know who it's going to be shortly."

Fury and his co-promoter Frank Warren recently expressed doubt that a third fight with American Deontay Wilder would happen in 2020.

Fury claimed the WBC belt off Wilder with a seventh-round stoppage in February, after their draw in 2018.

The 32-year-old Fury announced in June that he had agreed to a two-fight deal with Anthony Joshua. The sides said that the first bout could take place sometime in 2021 in what would be an all-British showdown between the current holders of the heavyweight belts.

Joshua is scheduled to fight Kubrat Pulev on Dec. 12 at the O2 Arena in London. The fight was postponed from June because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Source: NBA targeting Dec. 22 season start

The NBA may be back before Christmas and fans could return to games at some point next season, if one plan considered by the league's board of governors becomes a reality.

The board is targeting a Dec. 22 start to what would be a season of 70 to 72 games, with the NBA Finals ending in June again, according to a person with knowledge of the situation. The person said the possibility of fans being at games would hinge on how a particular market is faring against the coronavirus at that time.

There are other options, such as waiting until later in the season to begin play with the hope that more arenas would be able to have fans. But starting in December instead of mid-January or later could generate a difference of roughly \$500 million in revenue, the person said.