

US coronavirus deaths eclipse 700K

Associated Press

It's a milestone that by all accounts didn't have to happen this soon.

The U.S. death toll from COVID-19 eclipsed 700,000 late Friday — a number greater than the population of Boston. The last 100,000 deaths occurred during a time when vaccines — which overwhelmingly prevent deaths, hospitalizations and serious illness — were available to any American over the age of 12.

The milestone is deeply frustrating to doctors, public health officials and the American public, who watched a pandemic that had been easing earlier in the summer take a dark turn. Tens of millions of Americans have refused to get vaccinated, allowing the highly contagious delta variant to tear through the country and send the death toll from 600,000 to 700,000 in 3½ months.

Florida suffered by far the most deaths of any state during that period, with the virus killing about 17,000 residents since the middle of June. Texas was second with 13,000 deaths. The two states account for 15% of the country's population, but more than 30% of the nation's deaths since crossing the 600,000 threshold.

Dr. David Dowdy, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who has analyzed publicly reported state data, said it's safe to say at least 70,000 of the last 100,000 deaths were in unvaccinated people. And of those vaccinated people who died with breakthrough infections, most caught the virus from an unvaccinated person, he said.

"If we had been more effective in our vaccination, then I think it's fair to say, we could have prevented 90% of those deaths," since

mid-June, Dowdy said.

"It's not just a number on a screen," Dowdy said. "It's tens of thousands of these tragic stories of people whose families have lost someone who means the world to them."

When deaths surpassed 600,000 in mid-June, vaccinations already were driving down caseloads, restrictions were being lifted and people looked forward to life returning to normal over the summer. Deaths per day in the U.S. had plummeted to an average of around 340, from a high of over 3,000 in mid-January. Soon afterward, health officials declared it a pandemic of the unvaccinated.

But as the delta variant swept the country, caseloads and deaths soared — especially among the unvaccinated and younger people, with hospitals around the country reporting dramatic increases in admissions and deaths among people under 65.

Nonlethal rounds fail to stop 'ninja' in attack on troops

BY CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

Nonlethal rounds failed to stop a sword-wielding man dressed as a ninja who authorities say injured two special operations soldiers, then brandished his blade at sheriff's deputies last month at a California airport, according to authorities.

Deputies from a Kern County Sheriff's Office substation in Ridgecrest, Calif., responded to a call of an assault with a deadly weapon Sept. 18 at Inyokern Airport, the office said in a statement posted Friday on Twitter. The airport is in the Mojave Desert, near Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake.

When deputies arrived on the scene, they found some 26 special operations soldiers training at the airport "hunkered down" in the hangar after an attack by a man dressed as a ninja, Ridgecrest Police Department records show. Stars and Stripes first reported details of the incident, which was revealed in a military report leaked on social media, earlier this week.

Officers discovered the suspect had assaulted one victim with a sword and hit another victim after tossing a rock through a

hangar window, the sheriff's office said.

The suspect, identified as Gino Rivera, 35, was booked for attempted homicide, assault with a deadly weapon, brandishing a weapon, brandishing a weapon with the intent to resist or prevent an arrest, vandalism, and obstruct/delay a peace officer in the discharge of their duties, according to the Kern County Sheriff's Office.

The victims were identified as a staff sergeant and captain with F Co., 2nd Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, according to the report posted on social media. A spokesman for the Army's Special Operations Aviation Command confirmed the incident occurred, but declined to provide further details.

The staff sergeant was outside the hangar smoking when the ninja-clad Rivera approached and asked the soldier if he knew who he was. The soldier did not. Rivera then asked if the soldier knew where his family was — the soldier did not — prompting Rivera to slash the soldier's phone, knee and leg with a sword.

The soldier then ran through the parking lot and jumped a fence before entering the hangar's admin building, where the staff

sergeant and an unnamed captain began locking doors and calling 911, the leaked report said.

Rivera gave chase, kicking and punching the building's doors and windows before leaving to grab a large piece of asphalt that he tossed through the window.

When Ridgecrest Police responded to the scene, Rivera refused to follow commands and brandished the sword at deputies, authorities said.

"Non-lethal rounds were deployed but were ineffective," the sheriff's office said in Friday's statement.

Rivera ran and continued to disobey commands. He dropped the sword after a taser was deployed, authorities said.

"Deputies used control holds to take Rivera into custody," the sheriff's office said.

Officials said the wounded soldiers were taken to a local hospital for treatment. The military report on social media said the two soldiers both required multiple stitches for their wounds before returning to duty.

Rivera was being held on a \$125,000 bond with a court hearing scheduled for Oct. 25, said inmate information on the sheriff's department website.

Biden confident as talks drag on \$3.5 trillion plan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden pledged Friday at the Capitol to “get it done” as Democrats strained to rescue a scaled-back version of his \$3.5 trillion government-overhaul plan and salvage a related public works bill after days of frantic negotiations.

But it’s not getting done right now.

Biden huddled with House Democrats on their home ground in a private meeting that was part instructional, part morale booster for the tattered caucus of lawmakers, telling them he wanted both bills passed regardless of the time it takes. He discussed a compromise topline of \$1.9 trillion to more than \$2 trillion for his bigger vision, according to lawmakers in the room.

But it was clear they are all now in it for the long haul as the White House and its allies in Congress prepared for protracted negotiations.

“It doesn’t matter whether it’s six minutes, six days or six weeks — we’re going to

get it done,” Biden declared to reporters as he left his late-afternoon meeting at the Capitol.

It’s a pivotal time for both president and party, as Biden’s approval ratings have dropped and Democrats are restless, eager to deliver on his signature campaign promise of rebuilding the country. His ideas go beyond roads-and-bridges infrastructure to delivering dental, vision and hearing care for seniors, free pre-kindergarten for youngsters, major efforts to tackle climate change and other investments that would touch countless American lives.

Biden’s sudden excursion to Capitol Hill was aimed at giving the legislation a needed boost toward the finish line. Holdout Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia had sunk hopes for a swift compromise on a framework when he refused to budge late Thursday on his demands for a smaller overall package, around \$1.5 trillion, despite hours of shuttle diplomacy with White House aides.

Army veteran is awarded \$8.2M in fourth trial over 3M earplugs

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

A federal jury on Friday awarded \$8.2 million to Army veteran Brandon Adkins in his lawsuit against manufacturer 3M that claimed the company’s earplugs that he used during his military service damaged his hearing.

It is the fourth trial against Minnesota-based company 3M related to earplugs that it sold to the military. Those earplugs were used during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 250,000 cases have been filed against the company.

All cases have gone before Judge Casey Rogers in the Northern District of Florida, and three of the four have ended in favor of the veteran. In one trial, the jury sided with 3M.

“We are humbled by the bravery and

courage shown by service members like Brandon Adkins not only for their service to our country, but also for standing up against 3M on behalf of all the veterans who now face preventable hearing loss and tinnitus as a result of the [combat arms version 2] earplugs,” said Adkins’ attorneys Bryan Aylstock of Aylstock Witkin Kreis & Overholtz, PLLC, Shelley Hutson of Clark, Love & Hutson GP, and Christopher Seeger of Seeger Weiss LLP.

Adkins, who lives in Washington state, has hearing loss and bilateral tinnitus, or a ringing in the ears, according to the lawsuit filed Jan. 17, 2020.

“While we are disappointed in today’s verdict, it is just one of several initial steps in this litigation, with many more cases to be tried before different juries,” 3M representatives said in a statement.

Judge saves US visas for some, not all in lottery

Associated Press

A U.S. judge has set aside roughly 7,000 visas allowing people who won a lottery aimed at increasing the country’s diversity to try to go to the United States after the government issued only a fraction of the visas allocated for the past year.

U.S. District Judge Amit P. Mehta in Washington issued the order after the State Department gave out only 27% of up to 55,000 diversity visas allotted for the fiscal year that ended in September. The agency has said the delays stemmed from coronavirus-related issues, but Mehta said that’s only part of the problem.

“Some of that shortfall is no doubt due to the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic is not the primary culprit,” Mehta wrote in a ruling late Thursday. “That would be the State Department’s complete cessation of adjudicating diversity visa applications for five months and its unlawful deprioritizing of those applications when adjudications resumed.”

A State Department official declined to comment on the decision.

Millions of people from around the world enter the lottery each year, hoping for a shot at a visa to go to the United States.

Their chances are already slim, with up to 55,000 visas set aside each year for people from countries with low representation in the United States, many from Africa and Europe.

From there, applicants must file paperwork and wait in another line for a consular interview, and not all get visas before the U.S. runs out, even in a normal year.

Any visas that are not issued typically expire at the end of the fiscal year each September.

Those circumstances led to Mehta’s calculation on how many visas should remain viable for more than 20,000 applicants from countries spanning from Cuba to Nepal who sued over the delays.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs said they were pleased he kept the hopes of some of their clients alive, but it was not enough, adding that the lottery winners now face a roughly 1-in-3 chance of prevailing.

“It’s unfortunate that now our plaintiffs have to do another lottery,” lawyer Rafael Urena said in a statement.

Doctors wary, await ruling on Texas law

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — A federal judge is deciding whether to block the nation's most restrictive abortion law, which has banned most abortions in Texas since early September and sent women racing hundreds of miles to get abortions outside the state.

The Biden administration on Friday urged U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman to suspend the law, saying Texas has waged an attack on a woman's constitutional right to abortion. But even if the law is put on hold, abortion services in the second-most populous state may not instantly resume because doctors still fear that they could be sued without a more permanent legal decision.

That worry underscores the durability of Senate Bill 8, which has already withstood a wave of challenges. Pitman, based in Austin

and who was appointed by former President Barack Obama, presided over a nearly three-hour hearing Friday but did not say when he will rule.

The law bans abortions once cardiac activity is detected, which is usually around six weeks, before some women know they are pregnant. To enforce the law, Texas deputized private citizens to file lawsuits against violators, and has entitled them to at least \$10,000 in damages if successful.

So far, abortion providers trying to block the Texas law have been rejected at every turn. That makes the lawsuit filed by the Justice Department their best chance yet to deliver the first legal blow to the GOP-engineered restrictions, which were signed into law by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in May and took effect Sept. 1.

Amy Hagstrom Miller, president of

Whole Woman's Health, said some of the 17 physicians at her four clinics are ready to resume normal abortion services if the law is put on hold. Preparations began last week when some doctors gave patients found to have cardiac activity information to comply with another restriction — requiring a 24-hour waiting period before an abortion — so that they would be ready to be called back.

"It's not the hundreds of people we've had to turn away," Hagstrom Miller said in an interview. "But there is a significant group of people who have said, 'Please, let me do whatever I can. Keep me on a list, and call me if you get an injunction.'"

But the majority of her physicians, Hagstrom Miller said, remain wary and fear lawsuits absent a permanent court ruling. Clinic staff are also worried. "Of course, we understand that," she said.

Duterte announces retirement from politics

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on Saturday announced he was retiring from politics and dropping plans to run for vice president in next year's elections when his term ends, avoiding a legal battle with opponents who question such a move.

Speaking before reporters, Duterte said many Filipinos have expressed their opposition to his vice-presidential bid in surveys and public forums.

"The overwhelming sentiment of the Filipino is that I'm not qualified, and it would be a violation of the constitution," Duterte said. "In obedience to the will of the people ... I will follow what you wish and today I announce my retirement from politics."

The 76-year-old leader, known for his deadly anti-drugs crackdown, brash rhetoric and unorthodox political style, earlier accepted the ruling party's nomination for him to seek the vice presidency in the May 9 elections. The

decision outraged many of his opponents, who have described him as a human rights calamity in an Asian bastion of democracy.

Duterte announced his surprise withdrawal from the election after accompanying his former longtime aide, Sen. Bong Go, to register his own vice presidential candidacy with the ruling party at a Commission on Elections center.

Philippine presidents are limited by the constitution to a single six-year term and opponents had

said they would question the legality of Duterte's announced vice presidential run before the Supreme Court if he pursues his bid.

While two past presidents have run for lower elected positions after their terms ended in recent history, Duterte was the first to consider running for the vice presidency. If he pursued the candidacy and won, that could elevate him back to the presidency if the elected leader dies or is incapacitated for any reason.

US auto sales slump due to computer chip shortage

Associated Press

DETROIT — In a normal month before the pandemic, Con Paulos' Chevy dealership in Jerome, Idaho, sold around 40 new vehicles. In September, it was only six. Now he's got nothing new in stock, and every car, truck or SUV on order has been sold.

Last month, what happened at his dealership about 115 miles southeast of Boise was repeated across the country as factory closures due to a worsening

global shortage of computer chips crimped U.S. new vehicle shipments.

U.S. new vehicle sales tumbled about 26% in September as chip shortages and other parts-supply disruptions cut into the selection on dealer lots and raised prices once again to record levels. That sent many frustrated consumers to the sidelines to wait out a shortage that has hobbled the industry since late last year.

Automakers sold just over 1

million vehicles during the month, according to Edmunds.com, a figure that included estimates for Ford and others that didn't report numbers Friday. September was the lowest sales month of the year, Edmunds said. For the third quarter, sales were 3.4 million, down 13% from the same period a year ago.

Automakers on Friday reported some pretty poor numbers. General Motors, which only reports sales by quarter, said its deliveries were off nearly 33%

from July through September of last year. Stellantis, formerly Fiat Chrysler, saw quarterly sales dip 19%, while Nissan sales were down 10% for the quarter.

Honda's U.S. sales fell almost 25% last month, and were down 11% for the quarter. At Toyota, sales were off 22% for September but up just over 1% in the third quarter. Hyundai reported sales off 2% last month but up 4% for the third quarter. Volkswagen third-quarter sales were down 8%.

House subpoenas could shed light on Jan. 6 origins

Associated Press

The House committee investigating the violent Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection, with its latest round of subpoenas, may uncover the degree to which former President Donald Trump, his campaign and White House were involved in planning the rally — which had been billed as a grassroots demonstration — that preceded the riot.

The 11 subpoenas sent this week went to people who organized or worked at the rally at the Ellipse where Trump encouraged the crowd to march to the Capitol and told them “you’ll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength, and you have to be strong.”

Most of the organizers had worked on Trump’s presidential campaign or in his administration and could provide new details of how the rally that launched the violent attack came together.

The committee’s demands included materials having to do with planning, funding and participation in the event at the Ellipse, which was organized to protest the results of the November elections, as well as events that led up to it, including a bus tour and marches in Washington in November and December. The committee said it also asked for communications with Trump administration officials and lawmakers, which could show whether and how deeply government officials were involved in the day’s planning.

One of the people subpoenaed, whose firm was hired to provide event security that day, told The Associated Press he planned to cooperate.

“We have every intention of complying with the House select committee,” said Lyndon Brentnall, who runs Florida-based RMS Protective Services. “As far as we’re concerned, we ran security at a legally permitted event run in conjunction with the U.S. Secret Service and the Park Police.”

It was not clear whether the others would turn over documents by Oct. 13 or testify in depositions scheduled from late October through the beginning of November, as the committee has demanded. The AP sent emails and text messages, called phone listings or sent messages to online accounts for every person subpoenaed, but only Brentnall provided comment.

Brentnall said staff who worked security with him at the event were vetted by the Secret Service and Park Police. Their names, phone numbers and Social Security numbers were submitted in advance, he said.

“We literally ran the event security and the transport of VIPs from the hotel into the event, and then from the event into the hotel. That’s literally all we did,” he told AP.

Two people familiar with the planning of the event have told the AP that the White House coordinated with event organizers after Trump became aware of the plans for the rally in mid-December. They weren’t authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Nearly all the people subpoenaed were listed on the permit for the event, which was issued to Women for America First, a pro-Trump group with roots in the tea party movement.

Flooded Tennessee town wrestles with rebuilding

Associated Press

WAVERLY, Tenn. — In the 100 years that Jim Traylor’s family had lived in his house in rural Waverly, Tenn., it hadn’t once flooded. The normally shallow Trace Creek where he had fished and swam as a kid had never crossed the one-lane road that separated it from his home.

That changed on Aug. 21, when more than 17 inches of rain just upstream transformed the usually placid waterway into a roiling river that rushed into his house and devastated the town, killing 20 people.

The water was already halfway up his tires by the time the 79-year-old decided to flee.

“Sitting here in the car and just watching it, how fast it was coming this way — it’d blow your mind,” he said recently. “It’s unreal. You can’t imagine.”

Traylor’s family got out safe, dogs and all, but the home his grandfather bought in 1921 may have seen its last days, barring help from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. He doesn’t have the money to repair it and doesn’t want a loan.

“At (almost) 80 years old, I can’t see it,” Traylor said. “I’d love to save the old house. That’s why I put so much money into it. Because it was home.”

A hundred years ago, the massive flood would have been seen as a fluke of nature, a once-in-a-lifetime event. Residents could have built back without fear. But today, climate change is making the type of flood-producing rainfall that inundated Waverly more common, experts say.

And so now, the roughly 4,000 people who live there face a dilemma. With more than 500 homes and 50 businesses damaged, Waverly will likely see massive losses in property and sales tax revenue even as it prepares to spend millions on debris removal and infrastructure repairs. If those homes and businesses don’t return, the town

could slowly die.

But if they build back along the creek, are they risking another disaster?

Janey Smith Camp, a Vanderbilt University engineering professor, said there are a number of options for communities that risk a repeat of devastating floods, including the need to “really think about whether or not it makes sense to rebuild in some areas.”

“I fully realize that we’re talking about people’s lives, their homes — and some of them may be multigenerational,” Camp said. “It’s a tough thing to swallow. But there’s a point that we need to start saying, ‘It’s not safe to live here anymore.’”

Camp said similar tough discussions are happening elsewhere, including in Nebraska, where an entire town is considering relocating to a higher elevation after 2019 floods. Over the past decade, weather-related storms, fires and floods have displaced about 23 million people a year globally, according to the World Meteorological Organization. After Waverly was ravaged, more than a dozen Tennessee mayors formed a group aimed at bolstering communities against flooding.

State and federal officials said they’re willing to help if more funding is needed, without making specific commitments yet.

Already, Humphreys County commissioners have said they won’t push to rebuild a low-income public housing complex near the creek after families testified that they don’t want to go back. Residents suggested a memorial for neighbors who lost their lives.

Many in town hope the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will solve their problem. The Corps has surveyed the flooded area and is seeking funding for an analysis, but any follow-up would require some local money. That could be a big ask for a small town.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

School crossing guard marks 100th birthday

NC GREENSBORO — A North Carolina man who reached his 100th birthday has been celebrated by the elementary school students he helps get through morning traffic and safely to class.

Students at Peck Elementary School marked the milestone birthday for Thomas Faucette with hand-decorated birthday hats and two-dimensional construction paper candles, the News & Record of Greensboro reported. Faucette also accepted a plaque from Greensboro Police Chief Brian James in appreciation for his service with the department.

Faucette began his part-time career as a crossing guard in 1988.

Activists chained to boat at home arrested

MA SWAMPSCOTT — Several environmental activists who chained themselves to a pink sailboat with the words “climate emergency” on the side at Gov. Charlie Baker’s home were arrested, state police said.

In addition to the six people who chained themselves to the boat, a seventh person who was on top of the boat was arrested, according to an emailed statement from state police spokesperson David Procopio.

The protesters used the sailboat on a trailer to block the road outside the governor’s Swampscott home at about 7 a.m. It was unclear if Baker was at home.

The protesters from a group called Extinction Rebellion

Boston posted on social media that they “put Baker under a ‘citizen’s arrest’ for his repeated crimes against environmental justice communities and climate inaction.”

Catfish eaten before check loses award

CT COVENTRY — Uncertainty about the species of a massive catfish that was eaten before it could be vetted by authorities in August has led Connecticut to withdraw its awarding of a new state record.

Connecticut Fish and Wildlife wrote in a Facebook post that because it was not able to examine the actual fish, authorities cannot confirm it was a white catfish.

“Without the ability to examine the actual fish, identification is left to still images and videos, which have proven to be ambiguous and inconclusive to definitively identify the species of catfish in this case,” state Fish and Wildlife wrote, adding that it is not disputing the weight of the catch that was made on Aug. 21.

Ben Tomkunus, 25, of Coventry, who caught the 21.3-pound fish, said he gave it to his grandfather the morning after he caught it and it was eaten.

Police shoot man after chase in parking lot

WA CLEARVIEW — Police from a King County agency shot and wounded a man at the end of a car chase in a grocery store parking lot south of Snohomish.

Snohomish County sheriff’s deputies responded to reports of “multiple shots fired” along

State Route 9, The Daily Herald reported.

One injured man was taken to Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, authorities said.

Snohomish County Sheriff’s Office spokesperson Courtney O’Keefe confirmed the officers involved in the shooting were from a King County agency.

A team of Snohomish County law enforcement agencies, Washington State Patrol and community members are investigating.

Monk seal travels 1K plus miles in month

HI HONOLULU — Researchers say an endangered Hawaiian monk seal has made an exceptionally fast and long swim across the archipelago.

The female seal, 6, made her way from Kure Atoll in the uninhabited Northwestern Hawaiian Islands to the North Shore of Oahu — a trip of about 1,300 miles. She made the grueling swim in only a month.

Michelle Barbieri, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program chief, said there is data that shows more than a dozen seals have made trips from the remote northern islands to the main islands in recent decades.

Female Supreme Court justice lies in state

TN NASHVILLE — Tennessee Supreme Court Justice Cornelia Clark, who died last month, lay in state at the State Capitol on Wednesday.

According to court officials,

Clark was the first active member of the judiciary to lie in state and the second woman after former state Sen. Thelma Harper did so earlier this year.

Clark was appointed to her seat in 2005 by former Democratic Gov. Phil Bredesen and served as chief justice from 2010 to 2012. The court announced she had died overnight on Sept. 24. She served 16 years in her role, the longest tenure of her counterparts on the court, and was on the bench for more than 1,100 Supreme Court cases.

Man charged after fake badge, guns found

MI NORTHFIELD TOWNSHIP — A man has been charged with false representation as a peace officer after a fake badge, two handguns and a shotgun were found in a vehicle which was off the road with a flat tire in Washtenaw County.

George Galbraith, 63, also was arraigned in Ann Arbor district court on weapons charges, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources said.

A conservation officer was patrolling Sept. 21 in Northfield Township, west of Detroit, when he saw a vehicle down an embankment.

A man inside the vehicle held up what turned out to be a fake badge and said he worked for an area police department. The officer later found the weapons and a gun belt containing a handcuff case. The man also was wearing a coat with a zip-on attachment that read “POLICE.”

— From Associated Press

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MLB's 200-inning club rapidly shrinking

Associated Press

Los Angeles Dodgers right-hander Walker Buehler has a lot of pride in reaching 200 innings pitched this season, especially considering he's battled injuries through parts of his career, including Tommy John surgery.

Considering the current state of big-league pitching, it's even more impressive.

"I've never done it before and it's weird because it used to be the norm," Buehler said. "It's been a goal of mine for a long time. It's hard to put into words because you're doing it over 32, 33 starts."

It appears that just four pitchers will reach the 200-inning mark this season, including Buehler, Phillies right-hander Zack Wheeler, Cardinals right-hander Adam Wainwright and Marlins righty Sandy Alcantara. That would be the fewest in a full season in modern MLB history.

Buehler's durability has been a bonus for the Dodgers, who have won 104 games and are still in the hunt for a share of the NL West title.

"It's great, certainly considering what we've been through with pitching," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "To really

be able to bank six or six-plus (innings) every time he takes the mound is huge."

It wasn't long ago that 200 innings pitched in a season was a common occurrence in the big leagues — a sign of a solid, healthy season but nothing special. Just two years ago, 15 pitchers topped the mark. In 2011, there were 39, led by Justin Verlander's 251 innings.

No one will get close to touching 250 this season. Wheeler could top 220 depending on how many innings he throws in his final start.

There are myriad reasons the 200-inning starter is becoming so rare. Among them:

■ **The COVID-19 effect:** The workload for starting pitchers had been trending downward for years, but it really accelerated during the coronavirus-shortened 2020 season. When pitchers returned for the abbreviated summer camp, teams were ultra-cautious with their starters. It's an approach that's largely continued into 2021.

■ **Pitch counts:** The concept of limiting a starter's pitches in an outing is far from new, but managers are sticking to lower limits, even for ace pitchers. In 2019, starters were allowed to throw at least 100 pitch-

es 1,167 times. Two years later, that number might not even reach 700.

■ **Openers:** Also not a new concept, but the idea of starting the game with a reliever or having "bullpen" games has become more commonplace throughout the league. The Tampa Bay Rays — who made the World Series in 2020 and could win 100 games this season — have been one of the biggest proponents of the trend. Their starting pitchers have thrown less than 80 pitches 84 times this season, which leads MLB.

■ **26-man rosters:** MLB has historically allowed 25 players on the active roster, but that number was bumped to 28 in the altered 2020 season. Starting in 2021, the number was reduced to 26, but it still allowed many teams to carry another pitcher in the bullpen.

Miami manager Don Mattingly said pitchers still relish taking the mound every fifth day and going deep into games.

"When he's out there, he's thinking nine (innings) all the time," Mattingly said. "He doesn't like coming out of games. It's just a continuation of his growth. It's a mark for guys just being out there for your club."

Surprising Giants clinch at least tie in NL West

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The San Francisco Giants couldn't celebrate a division title yet — not with the rival Dodgers still going win for win in the NL West race.

San Francisco clinched at least a tie pursuing its first West title since 2012 by matching the franchise record with its 106th win, beating the San Diego Padres 3-0 Friday night before turning attention to Los Angeles' home game against Milwaukee.

"They're probably more frustrated with us because we're ahead and we keep winning," Giants winning pitcher Anthony DeSclafani said.

Darin Ruf hit a first-inning home run and Mike Yastrzemski added an RBI single to send San Francisco on its way to a seventh straight win, and then the Giants waited on the Dodgers' victorious 8-6 result against the NL Central champion Brewers. A Dodgers loss would have ensured San Francisco the division crown outright over the eight-time defending West winners and reigning World Series champions. If the teams finish with the same record, they'll play a tiebreaker game.

Rays 4, Yankees 3: Gary Sánchez and

Rougned Odor both struck out with two runners on to blunt a ninth-inning rally and the New York Yankees' lead atop the AL wild-card standings got even tighter with a 4-3 loss to the Tampa Bay Rays on Friday night.

The Yankees' edge fell to one game over Boston and two games over Toronto after those contenders each won. Seattle was two games back of New York going into the night.

Red Sox 4, Nationals 2: Hunter Renfroe and Bobby Dalbec hit back-to-back homers during a four-run sixth inning, and Boston maintained its playoff position by beating host Washington.

Blue Jays 6, Orioles 4: Steven Matz pitched seven solid innings to win his fifth straight decision, Danny Jansen homered and drove in three runs, and Toronto beat visiting Baltimore to keep its playoff hopes alive.

Cardinals 4, Cubs 3: Paul Goldschmidt hit a walk-off RBI single in the ninth inning, and playoff-bound host St. Louis beat Chicago for its 19th win in 20 games.

Athletics 8, Astros 6: Matt Olson and Chad Pinder each homered and visiting Oakland cut into Houston's edge for home-field advantage in the AL playoffs.

White Sox 8, Tigers 1: Lance Lynn pitched one-run ball over five innings, José Abreu homered and drove in four runs, and host Chicago beat Detroit for its fifth straight win.

Mets 4, Braves 3: Brandon Nimmo hit two solo home runs, Tylor Megill allowed one hit in five scoreless innings and visiting New York ended NL East champion Atlanta's six-game winning streak.

Phillies 5, Marlins 0: Bryce Harper had three hits including his 35th homer, Ranger Suárez pitched seven scoreless innings, and Philadelphia beat host Miami.

Pirates 9, Reds 2: Second baseman Cole Tucker made a spectacular diving catch, then hit his first career grand slam to cap an eight-run rally in the eighth inning that sent Pittsburgh over visiting Cincinnati.

Royals 11, Twins 6: Salvador Perez went hitless while every other Kansas City starter had at least one hit in a win over visiting Minnesota.

Indians 9, Rangers 4: Austin Hedges and Bobby Bradley homered, Jose Ramirez drove in three runs, and rookie Eli Morgan won his third straight start as Cleveland drubbed host Texas.

Iowa forces 7 turnovers in rout of Maryland

Associated Press

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Spencer Petras barely had time to exhale in the second quarter. The Iowa quarterback would come off the field following a scoring drive — then immediately return after the defense forced yet another turnover.

“You sit on the bench for two seconds, you’re right back out,” Petras said.

Petras threw for three touchdowns and ran for two and No. 5 Iowa took advantage of seven Maryland turnovers in a 51-14 victory Friday night.

The Hawkeyes (5-0, 2-0 Big Ten) intercepted five of Taulia Tagovailoa’s passes, and they outscored the Terrapins 31-0 in the second quarter as Maryland completely unraveled. The Terps (4-1, 1-1) never recovered after losing standout receiver Dontay Demus to an apparent

leg injury on a kickoff return early in the second.

Iowa beat Iowa State earlier this season thanks to a plus-four turnover margin on a day the Hawkeyes were badly out-gained. The matchup with Maryland was an even more extreme version of that. The Terrapins turned the ball over five times in the first half, four in the second quarter.

Tagovailoa had thrown only one interception all season — while leading the Big Ten in yards passing — but he was picked off on the Terrapins’ second possession Friday in a sign of things to come. That turnover led to a field goal that opened the scoring, but Maryland responded sharply, driving 69 yards in eight plays and taking the lead on a 9-yard scoring pass from Tagovailoa to Chigoziem Okonkwo.

No. 13 BYU 34, Utah State 20: Tyler Allgeier ran for a career-high 208 yards and three touchdowns to help the visiting Cougars beat the Aggies.

BYU (5-0) beat Utah State (3-2) for the second straight time in the Battle for the Old Wagon Wheel rivalry series.

Baylor Romney threw for 187 yards and a touchdown on 15-for-19 passing in the first half, but was injured just before halftime and sat out the second half. He made his second consecutive start with Jaren Hall sidelined because of a rib injury.

Third-string quarterback Jacob Conover led the offense after halftime. The freshman threw for 45 yards on 5-for-9 passing in his college debut.

Logan Bonner threw for 276 yards and two touchdowns for the Aggies. Bonner left with eight minutes to go because of a

knee injury.

The Cougars scored on their first four drives and averaged 9.1 yards per play before halftime. Romney completed his first eight passes, and Allgeier nearly eclipsed 100 rushing yards before halftime.

The Cougars took a 7-0 lead after Allgeier took a hit and burst down the sideline for a 22-yard run. Malik Moore intercepted Bonner’s pass at the BYU 26 to set up the scoring drive. Allgeier broke free and raced 59 yards for his second scoring run in the second quarter, pushing the lead to 24-10.

Allgeier’s second touchdown helped BYU regain a little momentum after Justin McGriff hauled in a 21-yard reception to cap an 18-play, 75-yard drive for Utah State that took 7 ½ minutes off the clock and cut the Cougars’ lead in half.

Amid scandal, NWSL commissioner Baird resigns

Associated Press

National Women’s Soccer League Commissioner Lisa Baird resigned after some 19 months on the job amid allegations that a former coach engaged in sexual harassment and misconduct.

Baird’s resignation was announced by the league late Friday, a day after The Athletic published the accounts of two former players who claimed misconduct, including sexual coercion, by North Carolina coach Paul Riley.

Riley was fired by the Courage on Thursday and the allegations touched off a wave of condemnation by players that forced this weekend’s games to be called off.

Additionally, FIFA on Friday opened an investigation into the case. It is rare that soccer’s international governing body gets involved in a controversy involving a member association. U.S. Soccer also announced an

independent investigation on Friday.

U.S. Soccer was instrumental in founding the NWSL in 2013 and helped support the league until last year, when it became independent. The federation continues its financial support of the league.

U.S. Soccer suspended Riley’s coaching license Thursday after The Athletic published claims of abuse made by former NWSL players Sinead Farrelly and Mana Shim.

FIFA told The Associated Press it was “deeply concerned” by the case and will now be seeking further details from American soccer authorities about the issues raised.

Riley told The Athletic the allegations were “completely untrue.”

Zalatoris fires 61 for share of lead

JACKSON, Miss. — Will Zalatoris felt like he couldn’t miss on

the green and rarely did Friday in setting the course record with an 11-under 61 to share the lead with Nick Watney and Sahithi Theegala in the Sanderson Farms Championship.

Zalatoris, voted the PGA Tour rookie of the year despite not having full status last year, made it look so simple at the Country Club of Jackson that his longest putt for par was 3 feet.

One of the poorer shots he hit was on the par-5 third hole after making the turn. He hit a weak fade into a bunker some 30 yards away and blasted out to 3 feet, turning a difficult shot into yet another birdie.

Watney, coming off his worst season in a decade, backed up a solid start with another good round. He opened with four birdies in six holes and dropped only one shot on his way to a 66.

Theegala also held his own after opening with a 64, new territory for the California rookie in

just his second start as a PGA Tour member. He chipped in for eagle on the par-5 third hole to right back in the mix. Theegala finished with a 30-foot birdie putt for a 67.

Wainwright, Cardinals agree on deal for 2022

ST. LOUIS — Longtime St. Louis ace Adam Wainwright will return next season, the club announced five days ahead of his next big start for the Cardinals.

The 40-year-old Wainwright and the Cardinals reached agreement on a one-year contract for 2022, the team said before Friday night’s game against the Chicago Cubs. Financial terms were not disclosed.

Wainwright is set to pitch Wednesday night in the NL wild-card game, on the road against either the Los Angeles Dodgers or San Francisco Giants. He is 17-7 with a 3.05 ERA.

Brady back in New England for 1st time

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Tom Brady's legacy is forever steeped in each of the six Super Bowl championship banners he had a part in hanging above New England's Gillette Stadium.

Yet, he might as well be playing in front of a mirror when he returns to face the Patriots.

Everything will be in reverse.

"I know that home locker room. I know that home tunnel. I know which way the wind blows. I know everything about that," Brady said this week. "So, in some ways it'll be unique. I've never had that experience. New England will be the first time for me being on the other sideline."

Brady will be back in Foxborough on Sunday night to meet the Patriots for the first time since he left after 20 seasons to

join the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. He'll be opposite not only former coach Bill Belichick, but past teammates who have also never taken an NFL field and looked across at Brady wearing another team's jersey, let alone ever had a chance to tackle him.

"The opportunity is wonderful and I'm looking forward for the moment," Patriots defensive end Deatrich Wise Jr. said.

While they all have played against former teammates before, the Patriots acknowledge this time is much different. None of those other players has the institutional knowledge Brady does of their defensive schemes or tendencies.

It makes the margin for error minute against a quarterback who is a master at getting the ball out quickly and reading and deceiving defenses with his

eyes.

"It's gonna be a guy that he's gonna know a lot of what we do," said veteran safety Devin McCourty, who won three Super Bowls with Brady. "So what we do, we've gotta do a good job of. We have to play our best football."

This 44-year-old version of Brady is still playing at a high level after taking the Bucs to a Super Bowl title last season. He leads the league this season with 10 touchdown passes and his 362.3 passing yards per game are second to Las Vegas' Derek Carr.

Tampa Bay's 34.3 points per game are also tied for tops in the NFL, thanks largely to one of the most stacked offenses in the league that includes receivers Chris Godwin, Mike Evans and tight end Rob Gronkowski

"This is one of those weeks where we can't have a bunch of 'my bads,'" McCourty said. "We gotta be on."

As much as Brady knows the Patriots, they also know him. But Belichick, 8-11 since Brady's departure, said it doesn't mean they will reinvent themselves this week.

"Certainly, Tom has an intimate knowledge of everything that we do here, more so than any other player in the league by far. So, I'm sure he'll use it to his advantage. I would expect him to," Belichick said. "I don't think it would be in our best interest to go in there and do everything differently than we've done it all year. What we need to do is continue to do the things we do and do them better. That would help us more than anything else."

Short-handed Panthers visit Cowboys and surging Elliott

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — In trying to prove they aren't just the "Carolina Christian McCaffreys," the Panthers will take on another running back with an All-Pro pedigree in Ezekiel Elliott and the surging ground game of the Dallas Cowboys.

McCaffrey won't play because of a strained hamstring when Carolina makes a second consecutive appearance in Texas on Sunday.

The Panthers (3-0) will have to figure on needing plenty of points even with the NFL's No. 1 defense because of the way quarterback Dak Prescott, Elliott and company are playing for the league's fifth-best offense.

"We're not called the Carolina Christian McCaffreys," tackle Cameron Erving, who played for the Cowboys last year, said after the star back was injured in the first quarter of last week's 24-9 victory at

Houston. "Everybody understands that we have to step up and make plays when he's not in there. At receiver, at tight end, at quarterback."

The Cowboys (2-1) are coming off their best back-to-back weeks in the running game since 2019, with Elliott getting a season-high 95 yards and two touchdowns in a 41-21 win over Philadelphia on Monday.

Dallas is averaging 179 yards on the ground in two victories since Prescott threw for 403 yards and the Cowboys ran for just 60 in a 31-29 loss to defending Super Bowl champion Tampa Bay in the opener.

The Cowboys didn't even try to establish the run against last year's top rushing defense. They're likely to give it a shot against the defense leading the NFL in all three yardage categories — total, rushing and passing — but they probably won't force it.

"It seems like each week we've had a little bit different

of a game plan," said Elliott, a 2016 All-Pro and two-time rushing champ. "I think we've showed that we can beat you through the air, we can beat you through the run, just depending on what you give us."

With the 2019 All-Pro McCaffrey out, rookie fourth-round pick Chuba Hubbard should make his first career start not far from his college home of Oklahoma State. Royce Freeman is likely to get some carries as well.

McCaffrey's 13-game absence last season because of injuries played a role in a third straight losing season for the Panthers in Matt Rhule's rookie year as coach.

Undefeated this far into the season for the first time since going to the Super Bowl six years ago, Carolina is ready to show it can win games without the former Stanford star.

"Christian doesn't want it to be just about him, but about everybody else," Rhule said.

"He's the ultimate leader. We'll miss him on the field, but we'll certainly miss him off the field."

Darnold's history

Sam Darnold is off to a solid start with his new club. One of the quarterback's few fond memories from three difficult years in New York was a 24-22 upset of Prescott and the Cowboys when the Jets were 0-5 in 2019, his second year. Darnold had 338 yards passing, the second most of his career, and two touchdowns.

On the flip side, Darnold is returning to the site of his final college game, when he lost two fumbles and threw an interception that was returned for a touchdown in Southern California's 24-7 loss to Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl.

Darnold skipped his final two college seasons and was the third overall pick in the draft by the Jets four months later — also at AT&T Stadium.