

## US sub hits object in South China Sea

*Bloomberg*

A U.S. nuclear-powered attack submarine struck an object while submerged in international waters in the Indo-Pacific region last week, the Navy said, adding that no life-threatening injuries were reported.

"The submarine remains in a safe and stable condition. USS Connecticut's nuclear propulsion plant and spaces were not affected and remain fully operational," U.S. Pacific Fleet said in a statement late Thursday, adding that the extent of the damage from the Oct 2. incident is being assessed.

A U.S. Naval Institute News report, citing an unnamed defense official, said 11 sailors suffered minor to moderate injuries when the submarine hit an unknown underwater object in the South China Sea. The last

known incidence of a U.S. submarine striking an underwater object took place in 2005, when the USS San Francisco struck an underwater mountain in a collision that killed one sailor aboard, it said.

The U.S. Navy's surface fleet has suffered several accidents in the busy Western Pacific in recent years, including back-to-back collisions involving two guided-missile destroyers in 2017. Those incidents prompted the dismissal of the Seventh Fleet's commander and extensive investigations into naval training, policies and equipment.

The USS Connecticut is one of three Sea-wolf-class submarines, which the U.S. Navy describes as "exceptionally quiet, fast, well-armed, and equipped with advanced sensors." The vessels have eight torpedo tubes

and can hold as many as 50 weapons in its torpedo room.

The incident occurred at about the same time as a large training exercise by U.S. allies with three aircraft carriers sailing in the nearby East Philippine Sea. The exercises were among several gestures toward Taiwan by the Biden administration and its allies in recent days.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said the U.S. should release details of the collision, adding American assertiveness in the region was ultimately to blame. "The U.S. side has been making waves in the South China Sea under the banner of freedom of navigation. This is the source of this accident," Zhao Lijian, said Friday at a regular news briefing in Beijing.

## China warns US over reports of forces in Taiwan

*The Washington Post*

TAIPEI, Taiwan — China reiterated calls for the United States to cut off military ties with Taiwan on Friday, in a cautious response to reports that U.S. Marines have been stationed on the self-ruled island for more than a year to strengthen its defenses against intensifying Chinese aggression.

Asked about the reports, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian avoided attacks on Washington and instead repeated standard Beijing talking points, saying that the United States should recognize the "high sensitivity" of the issue and halt military contact with Taiwan.

"China will take all necessary measures to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity," Zhao said.

China claims the island of 24 million people as part of its sovereign territory, threatening to take control by force if Taiwan's government formally declares independence. But proudly democratic Taiwan considers itself a country and has shown no interest in submitting to Chinese Communist Party rule.

About two dozen U.S. troops, including a special-operations unit and a contingent of Marines, have been in Taiwan to train military forces for more than a year, the Wall

Street Journal reported Thursday, citing unnamed U.S. officials.

Taiwan's foreign and defense ministries declined to comment on the report, which was a rare confirmation from U.S. officials of the nature of training programs in Taiwan. The Pentagon last year denied Marine special operatives were training in Taiwan after the island's military tacitly acknowledged the change to regular exchanges.

In a speech at the Yushan military forum in Taipei on Friday, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen did not address the matter but noted that developments in the Indo-Pacific were creating new tensions that "could have a devastating effect on international security and the global economy if they are not handled carefully."

The revelation threatens to undermine the tentative start of a detente in the year-long diplomatic feud between Washington and Beijing, as well as to set off a spiral of military tension as the United States and its allies counter China's efforts to gain a military advantage in the region.

Response on Chinese social media was muted on Friday, suggesting censors were tamping down discussion. The relative silence about Taiwan on Weibo, China's Twitter-like service, contrasted with a flurry of

nationalist commentators jumping on news of damage to a U.S. nuclear-powered Navy submarine that collided with an object in the South China Sea.

The few who did post about the Taiwan training program called for a stern response from Beijing, with users asking why China "was not striking back?" or calling for Taiwan to be "liberated" immediately by the People's Liberation Army.

On Weibo, Hu Xijin, editor in chief of Chinese state-backed Global Times, a stridently nationalist tabloid, taunted Washington for only sending 24 soldiers without fanfare, instead of openly setting up a base.

"Roll the dice," he jeered. "See whose willpower is ultimately stronger when it comes to the Taiwan issue."

China, angered by growing international sympathy and support for Taiwan from the United States and its allies, has sharply escalated its military aggression toward the island. In the past week, the Chinese air force flew a record 150-odd warplanes into Taiwan's air defense identification zone.

Taiwan's Defense Minister Chiu Kuocheng, in response to the warplane drills, said that military tensions across the Taiwan Strait were at their most serious in more than 40 years.

# Senate votes to extend debt ceiling

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Senate has dodged a U.S. debt disaster, voting to extend the government's borrowing authority into December and temporarily avert an unprecedented federal default that experts warned would devastate the economy and harm millions of Americans.

The party-line Democratic vote of 50-48 in support of the bill to raise the government's debt ceiling by nearly a half-trillion dollars brought instant relief in Washington and far beyond. However, it provides only a reprieve. Assuming the House goes along with the Senate's Thursday night vote, which it will, Republican and Democratic lawmakers will still have to tackle their deep differences

on the issue once more before year-end.

That debate will take place as lawmakers also work to fund the federal government for the new fiscal year and as they keep up their bitter battling over President Joe Biden's top domestic priorities — a bipartisan infrastructure plan with nearly \$550 billion in new spending as well as a much more expansive, \$3.5 trillion effort focused on health, safety net programs and the environment.

Easing the crisis at hand — a disastrous default looming in just weeks — the Republican Senate leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, offered his support for allowing a short-term extension of the government's borrowing authority after leading solid GOP opposition to a longer extension. He acted as Biden and busi-

ness leaders ramped up their concerns that a default would disrupt government payments to millions of Americans and throw the nation into recession.

The GOP concession to give up its blockade for now was not popular with some members of McConnell's Republican caucus, who complained that the nation's debt levels are unsustainable.

"I can't vote to raise this debt ceiling, not right now, especially given the plans at play to increase spending immediately by another \$3.5 trillion," Sen. Mike Lee of Utah said shortly before the vote.

Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas said the Democrats had been on "a path to surrender" on the process used to lift the debt cap, "and then unfortunately, yesterday, Republicans blinked."

## Biden to restore 3 national monuments cut by Trump

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden will restore two sprawling national monuments in Utah that have been at the center of a long-running public lands dispute, and a separate marine conservation area in New England that recently has been used for commercial fishing. Environmental protections at all three monuments had been stripped by former President Donald Trump.

The White House announced the changes Thursday night ahead of a ceremony expected Friday.

Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, a Republican, expressed disappointment in Biden's decision to restore Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante monuments, which the Trump administration downsized significantly in 2017.

The monuments cover vast expanses of southern Utah where red rocks reveal petroglyphs and cliff dwellings and distinctive buttes bulge from a grassy valley.

Trump invoked the century-old Antiquities Act to cut 2 million acres from the two monuments, calling restrictions on mining and other energy production a "massive land grab" that "should never have happened."

The White House said in a statement that Biden was "fulfilling a key promise" to restore the monuments to their full size and "upholding the longstanding principle that America's national parks, monuments and other protected areas are to be protected for all time and for all people."

Biden's plan also restores protections in the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts National Monument in the Atlantic Ocean, southeast of Cape Cod. Trump had made a rule change to allow commercial fishing at the marine monument, an action that was heralded by fishing groups but derided by environmentalists who pushed Biden and Interior Secretary Deb Haaland to restore protections against fishing.

## Abortions resume in Texas clinics after law suspended

*Associated Press*

AUSTIN, Texas — Abortions quickly resumed in at least six Texas clinics after a federal judge halted the most restrictive abortion law in the U.S., but other physicians remained hesitant, afraid the court order would not stand for long and thrust them back into legal jeopardy.

It was unclear how many abortions Texas clinics rushed to perform Thursday after U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman suspended the law known as Senate Bill 8, which since early September had banned abortions once cardiac activity is detected, usually around six weeks.

Prior to the blistering 113-page order late Wednesday, other courts had declined to stop the law, which bans abortions before some women even know they are pregnant.

"There's actually hope from patients and from staff, and I

think there's a little desperation in that hope," said Amy Hagstrom Miller, president of Whole Woman's Health, which operates four clinics in Texas. She said some of those clinics performed abortions Thursday but did not reveal how many.

"Folks know this opportunity could be short-lived," she said.

By all accounts, the ruling did not usher in a fast return to normal in Texas.

At least six Texas clinics resumed abortion services Thursday or were gearing up to offer them again, said Kelly Krause, spokeswoman for the Center for Reproductive Rights. There were roughly two dozen abortion clinics in Texas before the law took effect Sept. 1.

Planned Parenthood, the state's largest abortion provider, did not say Thursday whether it had resumed abortions, stressing the ongoing uncertainty and the possibility of an appeals court quickly reinstating the law in the coming days.

# Cause of oil pipeline leak still a mystery

*Associated Press*

HUNTINGTON BEACH, Calif. — Investigators searching for the cause of an oil pipeline break off the Southern California coast have pointed to the possibility that a ship anchor dragged the line across the seabed and cracked it, but two videos released so far provide only tantalizing clues about what might have happened 100 feet below the ocean surface.

A Coast Guard video released Thursday appears to show a trench in the seafloor leading to a bend in the submerged line, but experts offered varied opinions of the significance of the brief, grainy shots. An earlier video revealed a 13-inch rupture in the line, but the pipe showed no evidence of damage

that they said would be expected from a collision with a multi-ton anchor from cargo ships that routinely move through the area off the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

The slight bow in the line displayed in one video “doesn’t necessarily look like anchor damage,” Frank G. Adams, president of Houston-based Interface Consulting International, said in an email. When a pipeline is hit by an anchor or other heavy object “that typically results in physical damage that may lead to a fracture.”

Ramanan Krishnamoorti, a petroleum engineering professor at the University of Houston, said he considered the video that runs along a bend in the line “revealing.”

“It seems to me you’ve got something that

was dragged in the sand that might have impacted the pipeline,” he said.

However, he remained puzzled that the leak came from a crack and not a larger gash, assuming it was hit by an anchor or some other object.

Key questions remain: Could the line have been hit days before the leak started? What ship is responsible? And if a ship anchor is not the culprit, what else could it be?

Investigators, meanwhile, continued to hunt for the cause of the break that spilled tens of thousands of gallons of crude oil off the famed surf breaks of Huntington Beach, as well as determine what happened in the crucial early hours after reports of a possible oil spill first came in.

## Loss of giant sequoias in wildfires ‘heartbreaking’

*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — Northern California wildfires may have killed hundreds of giant sequoias as they swept through groves of the majestic monarchs in the Sierra Nevada, an official said Wednesday.

“It’s heartbreaking,” said Christy Brigham, head of resource management and science for Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks.

The lightning-caused KNP Complex that erupted on Sept. 9 has burned into 15 giant sequoia groves in the park, Brigham said.

More than 2,000 firefighters were battling the blaze in sometimes treacherous terrain. On Wednesday afternoon, four

people working on the fire were injured when a tree fell on them, the National Park Service reported.

The four were airlifted to hospitals and “while the injuries are serious, they are in stable condition,” the report said. It didn’t provide other details.

The KNP Complex was only 11% contained after burning 134 square miles of forest. Cooler weather has helped slow the flames and there was a possibility of slight rain on Friday, forecasters said.

The fire’s impact on giant sequoia groves was mixed. Most saw low- to medium-intensity fire behavior that the sequoias have evolved to survive, Brigham

said.

However, it appeared that two groves — including one with 5,000 trees — were seared by high-intensity fire that can send up 100-foot flames capable of burning the canopies of the towering trees.

That leaves the monarchs at risk of going up “like a horrible Roman candle,” Brigham said.

Two burned trees fell in Giant Forest, which is home to about 2,000 sequoias, including the General Sherman Tree, which is considered the world’s largest by volume. However, the most notable trees survived and Brigham said the grove appeared to be mostly intact.

## Request to OK vaccine for kids a relief for parents

*Associated Press*

Parents tired of worrying about classroom outbreaks and sick of telling their elementary school-age children no to sleepovers and family gatherings felt a wave of relief Thursday when Pfizer asked the U.S. government to authorize its COVID-19 vaccine for youngsters ages 5 to 11.

If regulators give the go-ahead, reduced-dose kids’ shots could begin within a matter of weeks.

That could bring many families a step closer to being done with remote learning, virus scares and repeated school shutdowns and quarantines.

“My son asked about playing sports. ‘After you’re vaccinated.’ He asked about seeing his

cousins again. ‘After you’re vaccinated.’ A lot of our plans are on hold,” said Sarah Staffiere of Waterville, Maine, whose 7-year-old has a rare immune disease that has forced the family to be extra cautious throughout the pandemic.

“When he’s vaccinated, it would give our family our lives back,” she said.

Expanding vaccine availability to roughly 28 million more U.S. children is seen as another milestone in the fight against the virus and comes amid an alarming rise in serious infections in youngsters because of the extra-contagious delta variant.

It would also push the U.S. vaccination drive further ahead of much of the rest of the world at a time when many poor countries are des-

perately short of vaccine.

The Food and Drug Administration must decide whether the shots are safe and effective in younger children.

Many parents and pediatricians are clamoring for protection for youngsters under 12, the current age cutoff for COVID-19 vaccinations in the U.S.

But there are also plenty of parents who are wary about getting the shot themselves and are in no hurry to have their children vaccinated.

Heather Miller, a mother of four from Dexter, Maine, said she wants to wait for follow-up studies on the vaccine. “I’m not 100% against getting it eventually, but I kind of fall into the ‘not right now, wait and see’ category,” she said.



# Deadly explosion rocks Afghan mosque

*Associated Press*

KABUL, Afghanistan — A blast went off Friday at a mosque packed with Shiite Muslim worshippers in northern Afghanistan, killing at least 46 people and wounding dozens in the latest security challenge to the Taliban as they transition from insurgency to governance.

The explosion tore through a mosque in the city of Kunduz during noon prayers, the highlight of the Muslim religious week. It blew out windows, charred the ceiling and scattered debris and twisted metal across the floor. Blood stains covered the front steps.

Area resident Hussaindad Rezayee said

he rushed to the mosque when he heard the explosion, just as prayers started. “I came to look for my relatives; the mosque was full,” he said.

The worshippers targeted Friday were Hazaras, who have long suffered from double discrimination as an ethnic minority and as followers of Shiite Islam in a majority Sunni country.

The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing. The claim was carried by the ISIS-linked Aamaq news agency and cited by the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors militant postings.

The local ISIS affiliate has been behind a rise in attacks, including against the Tali-

ban, since the departure of U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan at the end of August. ISIS and the Taliban, who seized control of the country with the exit of the foreign troops, are strategic rivals. ISIS militants have targeted Taliban positions and attempted to recruit members from their ranks.

In the past, the Taliban managed to contain the ISIS threat in tandem with U.S. and Afghan airstrikes. Without these, it remains unclear whether the Taliban can suppress what appears to be a growing ISIS footprint. The militants, once confined to the east, have penetrated the capital of Kabul and other provinces with new attacks.

## US employers add weak 194,000 jobs in slow gain

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — U.S. employers added just 194,000 jobs in September, a second straight tepid gain and evidence that the pandemic still has a grip on the economy with many companies struggling to fill millions of open jobs.

Friday’s report from the Labor Department also showed that the unemployment rate fell sharply to 4.8% from 5.2% in August.

The economy is showing some signs of emerging from the drag of the delta variant of the coronavirus, with confirmed new COVID-19 infections declining, restaurant traffic picking up slightly and consumers eager to spend.

But new infections remained high as September began, and employers are still

struggling to find workers because many people who lost jobs in the pandemic have yet to start looking again. Supply chain bottlenecks have also worsened, slowing factories, restraining homebuilders and emptying some store shelves.

Many economists still think that most of the roughly 3 million people who lost jobs and stopped looking for work since the pandemic struck will resume their searches as COVID-19 wanes. It took years after the 2008-2009 recession, they note, for the proportion of people working or seeking work to return to pre-recession levels. The government doesn’t count people as unemployed unless they’re actively looking for jobs.

Some of the factors that have kept many jobless people on the sidelines may be

starting to ease. According to a survey by the Census Bureau, for example, the number of people who aren’t working because they must stay home to care for a child declined by half in September compared with June. That figure had barely dropped last fall, when many schools remained closed and conducted virtual learning. The new census figures suggest that more parents, particularly mothers, might have rejoined the workforce last month as the school year began and their children returned to school.

In addition, an August survey by the job listings website Indeed found that the proportion of unemployed Americans who said they’d like to find a job once the school year began had more than doubled from just two months earlier.

## Russian, Filipino journalists awarded Peace Prize

*Associated Press*

MANILA, Philippines — Journalists Maria Ressa of the Philippines and Dmitry Muratov of Russia won the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize on Friday for their fight for freedom of expression in countries where media outlets have faced persistent attacks and reporters have been murdered.

In making the award, the Norwegian Nobel Committee stressed that an independent press is vital in promoting peace.

“Free, independent and fact-based journalism serves to protect against abuse of power, lies and war propaganda,” said Berit Reiss-Andersen, chair of the committee, explaining

why the prize was awarded to two journalists.

“Without freedom of expression and freedom of the press, it will be difficult to successfully promote fraternity between nations, disarmament and a better world order to succeed in our time,” she said.

The Nobel committee noted that Ressa in 2012 co-founded Rappler, a news website that has focused critical attention on President Rodrigo Duterte’s “controversial, murderous anti-drug campaign” in the Philippines.

She and Rappler “have also documented how social media is being used to spread fake news, harass opponents and manipulate public discourse.” The award-winning journalist

was convicted last year of libel and sentenced to jail in a decision seen as a major blow to press global freedom. She was the first woman awarded a Nobel this year.

Muratov was one of the founders in 1993 of the independent Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta, which the Nobel committee described as “the most independent newspaper in Russia today, with a fundamentally critical attitude towards power.”

“The newspaper’s fact-based journalism and professional integrity have made it an important source of information on censurable aspects of Russian society rarely mentioned by other media,” it added.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Dolly Parton, businesses donate to flood victims**

**TN** PIGEON FORGE — Country star Dolly Parton and her Smoky Mountain businesses have raised \$700,000 to help residents impacted by the catastrophic flooding in Middle Tennessee.

According to a news release, Parton chose United Way of Humphreys County to receive and distribute the donation at the suggestion of her friend and fellow country music legend Loretta Lynn. A foreman at Lynn's ranch was among those who died in the flood.

Parton said she was compelled to help out after the support the Smokies received following the 2016 Sevier County wildfires.

**High-altitude balloon test vehicle crashes**

**AZ** TUCSON — A high-altitude balloon test vehicle flown by a Tucson-based company crashed in the Rincon Mountains east of the city, but no injuries were reported.

World View Enterprises officials told the Arizona Daily Star that the unmanned flight took off from the company's headquarters and launch pad south of Tucson International Airport and crashed about 10:30 a.m.

According to the newspaper, World View has been flying unmanned stratospheric balloon missions from its Tucson site and other sites for research and commercial customers since 2014, logging more than 100 missions.

The company announced plans to begin offering \$50,000 tourist flights aboard special

manned capsules by 2024.

**Convicted sheriff gives 5-stars to jail he ran**

**AL** HUNTSVILLE — A longtime Alabama sheriff removed from office after being convicted of theft and ethics violations is giving five-star reviews to the jail where he spent more than two weeks in custody. Perhaps he should: He ran it for decades.

Ousted Limestone County Sheriff Mike Blakely addressed the news media in his most extensive public comments since being convicted in August. Free on bond while appealing, Blakely maintained his innocence but had no complaints about doing time in the Limestone County jail in Athens.

"Best jail in the state of Alabama — that's another thing I'm proud of," Blakely said during a news conference outside his attorney's office in Huntsville. "The food was real good, the staff took very good care of me."

Blakely, 70, was convicted in August of taking no-interest loans from a Limestone County jail fund that held prisoners' money and of stealing \$4,000 from his campaign account. He was in his 10th straight term at the time of his removal from office, making him Alabama's longest-serving sheriff at the time.

**Airport's \$195K grant to be used on security**

**WV** CHARLESTON — West Virginia's Yeager Airport is increasing security at the facility, using a \$195,000 grant from the state Emergency Management Division.

Part of the work will add a

gunshot detection system in the main terminal building and the General Aviation terminal, the airport said in a news release. Yeager said it will be the first airport in the state to have a gunshot detection system, providing a faster response to an active shooter incident.

The \$245,000 project will also add more security cameras throughout the airport complex and enhance radio and communication capabilities of the Airport Response Coordination Center, the release said.

**Crane collapse at station halts train lines**

**IL** CHICAGO — Several city train lines were halted after a crane collapsed at a Chicago Transit Authority station on the city's North Side, according to authorities.

No major injuries were immediately reported.

Chicago fire officials said a 200-ton capacity drill head construction crane tipped over while it was being used.

The crane fell off the tracks into an alley, according to transit officials.

A building nearby was evacuated and some area residents were without power.

Transit officials warned of major delays on train lines. Officials were investigating what caused the crane to tip over.

**Campaign encourages seat belts, safe driving**

**KY** FRANKFORT — Kentucky officials are participating in a campaign to encourage safe driving practices including the use of seat belts.

The high-visibility enforcement campaign called Oper-

ation Crash Reduction will run Oct. 8 to 11 and emphasize seat belt use to save lives, a statement from the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet said.

"While drivers can never control who they share the road with, one thing within everyone's control is the decision to buckle up and put the phone down every time you get in a vehicle to keep yourself safer no matter what," Gov. Andy Beshear said in the statement.

The Transportation Cabinet is partnering with state and local law enforcement and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to support the initiative.

From 2015 to 2019, October was the most likely month for fatal crashes, officials said.

**Restored nesting island wildly popular with birds**

**LA** RABBIT ISLAND — Restoration of an island in Louisiana's fragile coastal area is proving wildly popular with the birds it was rebuilt for, their numbers exploding on the recently added land, authorities said.

Pelicans, egrets, herons, ibis, terns, and other colonial water birds built about 6,100 nests on Rabbit Island — more than 16 times the number biologists had expected, a news release from the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority said.

The island supports the only brown pelican colony in southwest Louisiana, and about 1,500 pairs of pelicans were among the nesting birds. They included many of the 322 pelicans banded there this year and last, the agency said.

-From wire reports

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# Stafford, Rams manage win over Seahawks

Associated Press

Matthew Stafford was able to manage the discomfort with the finger on his throwing hand and pick apart the Seattle Seahawks' beleaguered defense.

Meanwhile, Russell Wilson was left as a spectator. His own finger injury was too severe for Seattle's star quarterback to continue against the division rival.

"It was just a little bit out of place and was able to put it back in and keep going," Stafford said. "It didn't affect me too much, to be honest with you."

Stafford seemed just fine, throwing for 365 yards and a touchdown and the Rams beat the Seahawks 26-17 on Thursday night in a game Wilson left in the second half with the finger injury on his throwing hand.

Wilson missed significant game time due to injury for the first time after injuring the middle finger on his throwing hand. Wilson was hurt by contact on a follow-through midway through the third quarter. He attempted to direct one more drive before turning the game over to backup Geno Smith.

Seattle coach Pete Carroll said it was a "badly sprained finger," and that further tests would be coming.

"He wasn't able to hold on to the football the way he needed to, to throw," Carroll said.

Held to just three points in the first half for only the fifth time in the regular season under Sean McVay, the Rams (4-1) woke up in the final 30 minutes and rebounded from their first loss of the season last Sunday to Arizona.

Stafford said his finger first started bothering him in the second quarter, but was

manageable. He threw a 13-yard touchdown pass to Tyler Higbee late in the third quarter to give the Rams a 16-7 lead. Stafford hit DeSean Jackson for 68 yards earlier in the quarter on third-and-10 that led to Darrell Henderson's 5-yard run that gave Los Angeles its first lead of the game.

And after Seattle (2-3) pulled to 16-14 in the fourth quarter, Stafford was 4-for-4 for 71 yards on the ensuing drive leading to Sony Michel's 2-yard touchdown run with 6:08 remaining.

Robert Woods had 12 catches for 150 yards and the Rams won their second straight in Seattle after last January's playoff victory over the Seahawks.

"He was big when we were backed up, made some explosive plays," Stafford said about Woods. "He played great tonight."

The Rams finished with 476 yards of offense, the most they've amassed in their last 20 games since Week 3 vs Buffalo in 2020 when they had 478. It's also their third-biggest offensive game in the last two calendar years since Week 5 at Seattle in 2019 when they posted 477 yards.

Seattle pulled to 23-17 on Jason Myers' field goal from 32 yards with 2:45 left. Seattle forced a quick punt after Carlos Dunlap batted down Stafford's third-down pass.

But Smith couldn't lead a storybook final drive, with his first pass intercepted by Nick Scott as Tyler Lockett tripped making his break. Smith was 10-for-17 for 131 yards in the fourth quarter.

"I really thought we had a chance and I thought we were going to come back and get it done. Unfortunately, we didn't," Smith said.

Smith was needed because Wilson's fin-

gers hit Aaron Donald's arm on the follow through of a pass that nearly went for a touchdown but was slightly overthrown midway through the third quarter.

Wilson remained in for one more series and attempted one pass. He was sacked on third-and-5 by Donald, No. 88½ of his career setting a new franchise record — although the Rams' records don't include Deacon Jones as sacks weren't an official stat when he played. Wilson never took another snap and finished 11-for-16 for 152 yards, one touchdown and his first interception of the season.

"It felt good and it's a blessing. It's even better when you can accomplish something like that coming off a divisional win," Donald said of the record.

Smith entered with Seattle backed up at its own 2. Since arriving in Seattle at the start of the 2019 season, Smith had thrown a total of five passes, all of them coming in a blowout win over the Jets last season.

On his first drive, Smith was perfect. He was 5-for-5 for 72 yards, the last a 23-yard strike to DK Metcalf for his second touchdown of the game with 9:23 remaining to pull Seattle to 16-14.

**Key penalty:** Seattle appeared to take a 14-3 lead at the end of the first half but a 15-yard touchdown pass to Lockett was called back on a holding penalty against Duane Brown. Jason Myers then missed a 35-yard field goal and the Seahawks had to settle for a 7-3 halftime advantage.

**Injuries:** Rams CB Darious Williams suffered an ankle injury in the fourth quarter and did not return. ... Seattle played without starting RB Chris Carson due to a neck issue.

## Seattle in limbo after Wilson injures hand in loss

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Of all the attributes that have made Russell Wilson one of the top quarterbacks in the NFL for several years, his durability has ranked high on the list.

He has never missed a start, and only rarely not taken a snap.

That streak of always being under center for the Seahawks could be at risk, depending on the severity of the finger injury sustained in Thursday's 26-17 loss to the Los Angeles Rams.

Seattle coach Pete Carroll

called the injury to the middle finger on Wilson's throwing hand a "badly sprained finger." It was bad enough that Wilson couldn't grip the ball the way he needed to in order to throw as Seattle needed while trying to rally in the fourth quarter.

So, Wilson became a spectator and Geno Smith took over.

"He's a great competitor. Guy didn't want to come out of the game, and that says a lot about this man," Smith said of Wilson. "He's tough as nails. And when I was out there, he was as sup-

portive as I am for him."

The last time someone other than Wilson took a meaningful snap for the Seahawks was the 2011 season. He has missed only a handful of plays here and there during his career, playing through numerous injuries that may have sidelined other QBs.

Wilson may have no choice this time. He stayed on the sideline during the fourth quarter as Smith tried to engineer a comeback, meaning the team had not put Wilson through the run of tests needed to determine the

severity of the injury.

Wilson was hurt during the third quarter, when his fingers hit Aaron Donald's arm on the follow through of a pass that nearly went for a touchdown, but was slightly overthrown.

Wilson remained in for one more series.

"The marvelous part about it is his attitude about how he approaches it," Carroll said. "I mean, he is going to heal himself, and he is the epitome of the mentality taking control of how your body functions."



# Arozarena shines, Rays blank Boston

*Associated Press*

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Randy Arozarena is off and running in October again.

The rookie showstopper became the first player to hit a home run and steal home in a postseason game, propelling the Tampa Bay Rays to a 5-0 victory over the Boston Red Sox in their AL Division Series opener Thursday night.

The breakout star of October last year, Arozarena made a breathtaking dash to the plate for the first straight steal of home in the postseason since Jackie Robinson did it for the Brooklyn Dodgers against Yogi Berra and the New York Yankees in the 1955 World Series, according to the FS1 broadcast.

“I noticed the pitcher wasn’t really keeping his attention to me. So I was able to take a big enough lead and be able to take that base,” Arozarena said through a translator. “That’s

the first time I’ve ever stolen home.”

Nelson Cruz also homered — off a Tropicana Field catwalk — and rookie Shane Bieber pitched five stellar innings for the AL East champions. Looking comfortable and confident all night, several Rays even snacked on popcorn in the dugout during the game.

Game 2 in the best-of-five series was Friday night.

Wander Franco also sparkled in his playoff debut, delivering an early RBI double that sent the speedy Arozarena home from first base to get the defending AL champs off to a quick start.

Arozarena, a 26-year-old Cuban who still qualifies as a rookie despite setting postseason records with 10 homers and 29 hits in 20 games a year ago, capped another exhilarating performance by stealing home against lefty reliever Josh Taylor to make it 5-0 in the sev-

enth inning.

“I think it just happens. You know, I just focus a little bit more,” Arozarena said about his postseason prowess. “Luckily, it’s happening in October. That means it’s closer to the World Series.”

It was the first steal of home of any kind in a playoff game since Javier Báez did it for the Chicago Cubs against the Los Angeles Dodgers in Game 1 of the 2016 NLCS.

Báez took a big lead off third base, drawing a pickoff attempt from catcher Carlos Ruiz. As soon as Ruiz let go of the ball, Baez scampered home and beat an off-balance throw from third baseman Justin Turner to the plate.

Marquis Grissom stole home for Cleveland to end Game 3 of the 1997 ALCS against Baltimore when Omar Vizquel missed a squeeze bunt and the ball deflected off the catcher’s mitt.

“This game is all about his-

tory, and any time you are putting your name in those categories like Randy has, I’ve never seen anything like it in 2020, and hopefully I’ll say that here at the end of 2021,” Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash said.

With one of the lowest payrolls in baseball and a roster lacking household names, the Rays are in the playoffs for a third straight year after winning a franchise-record 100 games and their second consecutive AL East title.

If not for Arozarena’s flashy, crowd-pleasing play and the hitting of the 20-year-old Franco, who was promoted to the majors in June, then McClanahan’s pitching may well have been the story of the night.

The 24-year-old lefty, who made his big league debut during Tampa Bay’s run to last year’s World Series, scattered five hits and struck out three in his first career playoff start.

## McCullers pitches gem as Astros outduel White Sox

*Associated Press*

HOUSTON — Lance McCullers Jr. was terrific. Yordan Alvarez delivered, and Jose Altuve scored on a nifty slide.

The Houston Astros sure love October.

McCullers pitched scoreless ball into the seventh inning, and the Astros beat Lance Lynn and the Chicago White Sox 6-1 in Game 1 of their AL Division Series on Thursday.

Michael Brantley added two hits and two RBIs as the AL West champions showed off their playoff experience in an impressive opening performance. McCullers allowed four hits in 6⅓ innings in his eighth career postseason start.

“You get the ball in Game 1 and your team is expecting this from you,” McCullers said.

While Houston is in the play-

offs for the fifth straight season, winning the World Series in 2017 and making it to the AL Championship Series last year, Chicago is making a second straight playoff appearance for the first time in franchise history. It lost to Oakland in the first round in 2020.

Game 2 of the best-of-five series was Friday in Houston. The teams also met in the 2005 World Series, with the White Sox sweeping the Astros for the title.

It was Houston’s eighth straight win in the opener of the division series dating to Game 1 of the 2004 NLDS against Atlanta.

“Everyone did their part, did their thing and we came out with a great win,” McCullers said.

McCullers, playing the role of staff ace after the Astros lost Gerrit Cole in free agency and

Justin Verlander to injury in recent years, struck out four and walked none. He set career highs with 13 wins, a 3.16 ERA and 185 strikeouts during the regular season, but he also led the AL with 76 walks.

The 28-year-old McCullers didn’t allow a hit until Yoán Moncada singled with one out in the fourth. The right-hander left to a standing ovation after giving up consecutive singles with two outs in the seventh. He waved to the cheering fans just before entering the dugout.

“The numbers speak for themselves,” White Sox manager Tony La Russa said. “We didn’t do much with him.”

Alvarez hit an RBI double in the third and a solo homer in the fifth. Manager Dusty Baker is thrilled to have the 2019 AL Rookie of the Year back this season

after he missed all but two games last year after surgery on both knees.

“You don’t know when he’s going to leave the yard and he’s going to drive in some big runs,” Baker said. “So, yeah life wasn’t too pleasant last year without Yordan.”

The 24-year-old Alvarez watched Houston’s 2020 playoff run on television.

“To be able to be back with the team and be able to help it out is really special for me,” he said through a translator.

Altuve wowed the crowd of 40,497 when he slid home and slapped the back of the plate just ahead of Yasmani Grandal’s tag in the third.

“I think the turn of the game was that slide by Altuve ... that gave us the momentum,” McCullers said.

# Pepi scores 2 goals, lifts US over Jamaica

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Ricardo Pepi and the young Americans saw a red, white and blue crowd, a scene seldom at past U.S. World Cup qualifiers, then dominated Jamaica behind the new 18-year-old sensation and moved into first place.

“We’re just sitting there and we’re on the train,” U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter said Thursday night after Pepi scored in the 49th and 62nd minutes in a 2-0 victory over Jamaica. “It’s amazing. I mean, an 18-year-old gets an opportunity and takes advantage of it. What you see, and I think what I really like, he has this instinct, and it’s really hard to teach that to players. And he has an instinct to score.”

Pepi, an El Paso native whose goal broke a second-half tie at Honduras in his international debut on Sept. 8, became the youngest American to score

in consecutive qualifiers.

With family and friends in the stands, he got the first goal from a flowing movement as good as can be produced by the U.S., which outshot the Reggae Boyz 17-5.

Goalkeeper Matt Turner rolled the ball to his right flank, where Sergiño Dest ran onto it just outside his own penalty area. In a burst of about 10 seconds, Dest sprinted forward while taking five touches and centered the ball to Yunus Musah, who was on the run.

Making his qualifying debut, Musah took four touches and dished wide to Dest, who one-timed a cross. Pepi broke away from Lowe and from about 8 yards glanced a downward header that went in on a bounce to the right of goalkeeper Andre Blake.

“Jamaica was so compact, we needed to go to the wings,” Pepi said. “We unlocked

them.”

The Americans took advantage of space.

“We just didn’t quite get our press right,” Jamaica defender Adrian Mariappa said. “At times just got a little bit naive.”

Pepi scored again when he re-directed a cross from Brenden Aaronson past Blake from 6 yards after Antonee Robinson quickly moved up the flank.

“It’s a special feeling being able to just score here in Texas,” Pepi said.

Pepi made his Major League Soccer debut for Dallas in June 2019 and decided just before the start of qualifying this summer to play for the U.S. over Mexico. His sudden rise on the international stage has sparked interest in European clubs interested in a transfer.

“I felt like it’s coming,” he said of all the attention. “I don’t know if it’s too fast or if it’s too slow. I feel like it’s coming and

whatever is going to come is going to come, and I feel like I have to be ready for it.”

Playing without injured attackers Christian Pulisic and Gio Reyna, the 13th-ranked U.S. improved to eight points after four of 14 matches in the final round of the North and Central American and Caribbean region.

Mexico dropped to second on goal difference after being held 1-1 by visiting Canada, which is third with six. Jorge Sanchez scored in the 21st minute for El Tri and Jonathan Osorio tied it in the 42nd.

Panama and El Salvador have five each after the Salvadorans won 1-0 at home on Enrico Hernández’s 37th-minute goal. Honduras and Costa Rica have three points apiece following a 0-0 draw in San Pedro Sula. No. 59 Jamaica, which has not gone to the World Cup since 1998, has one point.

## No. 15 Coastal Carolina wallops Arkansas State

Associated Press

JONESBORO, Ark. — Grayson McCall threw a 99-yard touchdown pass on his first attempt and No. 15 Coastal Carolina beat Arkansas State 52-20 on Thursday night for its 11th straight victory.

McCall completed 18 of 23 passes for a career-high 365 yards and four touchdowns without an interception.

Isaiah Likely also had a big night, catching eight passes for 232 yards and four touchdowns — all career highs — and kicking the game off with the school-record 99-yarder.

He became the first tight end in Sun Belt Conference history with four touchdown catches in a game.

“I got the best quarterback in the nation, the best O-Line in the nation. The reason we score 50 points in a game is the chemistry,” Likely said. “Our mantra is

to score as many points as we can. Score 50 points and get a burger. I love burgers.”

Coastal Carolina (6-0, 2-0 Sun Belt) also got scoring runs of 64 yards from Reese White and 67 yards from backup quarterback Bryce Carpenter — both career longs.

“I thought we played really well the first half and clamped them down,” Chanticleers coach Jamey Chadwell said.

The Chanticleers forced a punt on Arkansas State’s game-opening drive and took over on the 1. A run up the middle went nowhere and on second down, McCall, standing in the middle of the end zone, lofted a pass to tight end Likely, who made the catch in stride just past the 20 and raced downfield untouched for the score.

“That was a great way to start,” Chadwell said.

Shermari Jones, back after

missing two games to injury, rushed for 113 yards on 10 carries and dragged a defender into the end zone on a touchdown run from the 8.

Coastal Carolina rushed for 294 yards, averaging 8.2 yards per carry. The Chanticleers piled up 685 yards of total offense, holding Arkansas State (1-5, 0-2) to 273, including 18 on the ground.

“We’ve got to stop the run, we emphasized that all week,” Coastal Carolina defensive tackle C.J. Brewer said. “We want to make them one-dimensional and held them to 18 yards rushing.”

Layne Hatcher came into the game after halftime and led two Arkansas State scoring drives in the third quarter — posting 145 yards of offense in the quarter after the Red Wolves gained 51 in the first half.

Hatcher finished 13-of-29 passing for 185 yards with two

TDs and a late interception.

### The takeaway

Coastal Carolina: The Chanticleers are 2-3 versus Arkansas State, earning their first win in Jonesboro. ... The Chanticleers entered Thursday’s game allowing 286.6 yards per game, 16th-best in the nation. ... The defense held Arkansas State to minus-19 yards rushing in the first half, thanks in large part to three sacks, and ended with 18 yards rushing allowed ... Likely’s four TD catches were the most in a game since Matt Hazel had three TD catches in 2010.

Arkansas State: Starting quarterback James Blackman, a transfer from Florida State, was in street clothes on the sideline when the teams came back for the second half. Blackman was 7-for-12 passing for 70 yards and was sacked three times for a loss of 35 yards.