

## N. Korea flies warplanes near South

By DAVID CHOI

*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea flew a dozen warplanes Thursday near the border with South Korea, prompting the South to scramble more than 30 military aircraft in a dramatic escalation after a series of missile tests by the Communist regime.

The highly unusual moves took place hours after the North launched two ballistic missiles from Pyongyang into the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan, in the sixth round of tests in the past 12 days.

Following the missile tests, eight North Korean fighter jets and four bombers flew in formation and were believed to have conducted air-to-surface firing drills, South Korea's military told The Associated Press.

South Korea responded by scrambling 30 fighter jets and other military aircraft, the Ministry of National Defense said.

Although North Korea has sent military aircraft near the border before, the Yonhap news agency said it was probably the first time so many aircraft had been launched in such a provocative manner.

North Korea's recent missile tests have sharply escalated tension in the Korean Pen-

insula. The United States, South Korea and Japan have conducted joint exercises in response.

In Thursday's tests, the North's first missile flew roughly 217 miles at a peak altitude of 50 miles at Mach 5 speed, according to ministry estimates. The second flew roughly 497 miles at a peak altitude of 37 miles at Mach 6.

"Consecutive [North Korean] ballistic missile launches are a grave provocative act to harm not only the Korean Peninsula but also international peace and stability ... and we condemn this strongly and urge North Korea to stop it immediately," the ministry's text message said. "Our troops will maintain a firm readiness posture and are tracking and monitoring relevant moves in preparation for further [North Korean] provocations while working closely together with the U.S."

Thursday's launch was also announced in a tweet from the Japanese Prime Minister's Office. A separate message posted on the office's English-language Twitter account said the projectile had "likely flown over Japan," but that tweet was soon deleted.

The country's defense minister, Yasukazu Hamada, told reporters that Japan immedi-

ately protested through the North's embassy in Beijing, strongly condemning the act.

"We will continue working on drastically strengthening our defense power while examining every possibility, including the capability to attack enemy bases," he said.

North Korea's foreign ministry said in a statement Thursday that the elevated tensions were caused by the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group's presence.

The launch comes one day after South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff announced that the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and its strike group would redeploy near South Korea's eastern coast following anti-submarine drills with the South Korean and Japanese navies.

The Joint Chiefs cited the "highly unusual" timing of North Korea's provocations, which included an intermediate-range ballistic missile test on Tuesday.

The IRBM, suspected by experts to be a Hwasong-12 that can theoretically reach the U.S. territory of Guam, flew over Japan's Aomori prefecture and prompted rare take-shelter warnings from the Japanese government and U.S. military. Aomori is home to Misawa Air Base, headquarters of the 35th Fighter Wing.

## Troops back general who blasted Fox News host

By JOHN VANDIVER

*Stars and Stripes*

An investigative report that faulted a two-star general for publicly defending female troops following ridicule by a right-wing pundit has opened up the Army to blowback over its commitment to stand up for women in the ranks.

Maj. Gen. Patrick Donahoe, the former commander of the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning, Ga., brought "negative publicity" to the Army in connection with his tweets directed at Fox News host Tucker Carlson and others, according to

the Army report, which was obtained by Task and Purpose.

The controversy centered on Donahoe's decision to take issue with Carlson over a March 2021 segment in which the Fox host described the U.S. military as becoming "more feminine" while China's becomes "more masculine."

Carlson complained about Pentagon efforts to make military service more appealing to women, such as changes to grooming standards that allow new hairstyles and the introduction of a flight suit for pregnant troops.

Donahoe was quick to respond, posting a video on Twitter in which he reenlisted a female staff sergeant at Fort Benning and wrote "just a reminder that @TuckerCarlson couldn't be more wrong." Several other Army leaders made similar remarks on Twitter.

The Army investigation, however, determined that the "national media coverage" that followed from Donahoe's statements "brought a measurable amount of negative publicity to the Army, enough that (the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs) warned (the Secretary of

the Army) of the fallout," Task and Purpose reported.

The Army's rebuke of Donahoe, which also included criticism of his public pushback on Twitter over COVID-19 vaccine mandates in the military, has sparked an outcry in military circles.

"Army leadership is sending a very clear message: Pleasing gutless demagogues and loud mouthed extremists is more important than showing support for your brothers and sisters in arms," wrote one popular military Twitter user who goes by Rising 1L Tom.

# Solomons leader rules out China base

*Associated Press*

CANBERRA, Australia — The Solomon Islands' prime minister assured Australia on Thursday that he would not "endanger his country" by allowing China to establish a naval base in the South Pacific.

Solomons Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare made his first visit to the Australian capital, Canberra, since his counterpart Anthony Albanese's center-left Labor Party came to power at elections in May.

"Prime minister, I reiterate again that Solomon Islands will never be used for foreign military installations or institutions of foreign countries, because this will not be in the interest of Solomon Islands and its people," Sogavare told Albanese in front of reporters before their meeting began in Parliament House.

A bilateral security agreement between China and the Solomons signed early this year raised concerns of a Chinese naval base being established in the South Pacific. China has denied seeking a military foothold in the Solomons.

"My government's legacy is to safeguard the future of Solomon Islands and its people, and not to endanger the country and its citizens or the security of any forum country," Sogavare added, referring to the Pacific Islands Forum, a bloc of 18 regional neighbors that includes Australia.

The pair released a joint statement after their meeting rather than hold a customary joint press conference. The leaders "reaffirmed mutual security commitments and the Pacific family first approach to regional peace and security," the statement said.

Australia wants the Solomons to turn to its neighbors to support its security needs rather than China.

Australia already has a bilateral security treaty with the Solomons signed in 2017. It provides a legal basis for the rapid deployment of Australian police, troops and associated civilians in the event of a major security challenge. Australian police have been in the Solomons' capital, Honiara, since November to maintain peace after rioting.

US troops stationed in Japan see COLA fall to zero

**BY SETH ROBSON**

*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Cost-of-living allowance cuts have left U.S. service members stationed in Japan with hundreds of dollars less to spend each pay period, amid a weak yen and rising prices for off-base goods and services.

Most service members in the country are no longer receiving COLA — a tax-free allowance to help offset the costs of living in expensive areas overseas — following changes announced by the State Department on Oct. 1.

COLA fell to zero this month for troops on Okinawa, home to more than a dozen U.S.

bases and the lion's share of the 55,000 service members in Japan; at Yokosuka Naval Base, homeport of the U.S. 7th Fleet about 35 miles south of Tokyo; and at Yokota Air Base, an airlift hub that serves as headquarters for U.S. Forces Japan.

An online COLA calculator provided by the Defense Department shows that a sergeant stationed at Yokota with six years' service and two dependents would have received more than \$600 in COLA last October. A captain with the same family size and length of service would have gotten more than \$800.

The cut comes as prices rise across Japan because of a weak yen and increased costs

for energy, packaging and logistics. State broadcaster NHK reported Sunday that the cost of 6,700 food and beverage items, including processed meats, baby food and alcohol, would go up this month.

Prices of 20,665 items have or will be raised this year with an average increase of 14%, according to the report.

Gas prices at Army and Air Force Exchange Service stations are also on the rise. A gallon of premium sold for \$4.66 this week, but that's set to increase to \$4.80 on Saturday.

COLA amounts can fluctuate as often as twice per month or every pay period, according to Army Maj. Charlie Dietz, a spokesman at the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

# USAF school regains control of Facebook page after hack

**BY JONATHAN SNYDER**

*Stars and Stripes*

A hacker took control of the Air Force Officer Training School's official Facebook page this week, adding a profile picture of a man wearing socks with sandals, changing the page's status to "permanently closed" and deleting graduation photos.

Staff for the page — which has 22,000 followers and highlights airmen's progress in an eight-week course for becoming commissioned officers at Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala. — regained control Tuesday morning.

"We're back! It's us! THANK YOU for your patience! We're working to get the de-

leted posts restored as well as 22-09/10's photos up," the page's administrator wrote that morning. "No more socks and sandals though ... sorry."

The footwear of the man in the photo became a hot topic on social media. One commenter pointed out to Reddit's r/AirForce community that the training school had been "hacked by a man wearing socks with thong split sandals." Another commenting on the school's Tuesday post pleaded for admins to "bring back sandal man."

The page is managed by cadres at the schoolhouse, Air University spokesman Philip Berube told Stars and Stripes by phone

Wednesday. The training school did not respond to emailed questions that day.

The school's staff consists of full-time active-duty, Air Force Reserve, and Air National Guard members, including 106 officers, 42 enlisted and nine civilian personnel, as well as seven Air Force Reserve officers, according to the Air Force.

Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force JoAnne Bass referenced the hack Wednesday in a Facebook post highlighting the importance of cyber awareness.

"This is a great reminder to make sure your social media accounts are secured," she wrote, using a #socksand sandals hashtag.

# Russian missiles hit city near nuclear plant

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia launched missiles that hit apartment buildings in the southern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia, a local official said Thursday, killing three people and wounding at least 12 in a region that houses Europe's biggest nuclear power plant and which Moscow illegally annexed.

The two strikes, the first before dawn and another in the morning, damaged more than 40 buildings, local authorities said. The attacks came just hours after Ukraine's president announced that the country's military had retaken three more villages in another of the four regions annexed by Russia, the latest battlefield reversal for Moscow.

The Zaporizhzhia region's governor, Oleksandr Starukh wrote on Telegram that many people were rescued from the multistory buildings, including a 3-year-old girl who was taken to a hospital for treatment.

Photos provided by the Emergency Ser-

vice of Ukraine showed rescuers scrambling through rubble in the wreckage of a building looking for survivors.

Starukh said of Russia: "The terrorist country has shown its beastly face by converting defense weapons into offensive weapons and killing peacefully sleeping people."

Zaporizhzhia is one of the regions of Ukraine that Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed as Russian territory in violation of international laws and is home to a nuclear plant that is under Russian occupation. The city of the same name remains under Ukrainian control.

The deputy head of the Ukraine president's office, Kyrylo Tymoshenko, said 10 people were killed in the latest Russian attacks in the Dnipro, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions. It was not clear if that number included those killed in the morning strikes in Zaporizhzhia.

In his nightly video address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the Ukrainian army recaptured three more villages in the Kherson region. Novovoskrysenske, Novohryhorivka and Petropavlivka are all situated northeast of Kherson.

Ukrainian forces are seizing back villages in Kherson in humiliating battlefield defeats for Russian forces that have badly dented the image of a powerful Russian military and added to the tensions surrounding an ill-planned mobilization.

They have also fueled fighting among Kremlin insiders and left Putin increasingly cornered.

On Wednesday, the Ukrainian military said the Ukrainian flag was raised above seven Kherson region villages previously occupied by the Russians.

The closest of the liberated villages to the city of Kherson is Davydiv Brid, some 60 miles away.

## Bodies of kidnapped Calif. family found

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — A baby girl, her parents and uncle were found dead in a central California orchard two days after they were kidnapped at gunpoint from their business, police said.

"Our worst fears have been confirmed," Merced County Sheriff Vern Warnke said at a Wednesday news conference.

Warnke did not release any information about how and when police believe they were killed. He said the victims were close to each other when found by a farm worker in a remote area. The announcement came after authorities earlier Wednesday released surveillance video of a man kidnapping 8-month-old Aroohi Dheri; her mother Jasleen Kaur, 27; father Jasdeep Singh, 36; and uncle Amandeep Singh, 39, on Monday.

Authorities said they were taken by a convicted robber who tried to kill himself a day after the kidnappings. Jesus Sal-

gado, 48, was in critical condition when taken into custody but has been talking to police, Warnke said.

No motive for the kidnapping has been established, he said.

"There's no words right now to describe the anger I feel and the senselessness of this incident," Warnke said. "I said it earlier: There's a special place in hell for this guy."

Investigators, including crime lab technicians from the California Department of Justice, would be processing the crime scene through the night, Warnke said. The four family members were taken from their business in Merced, a city of 86,000 people about 125 miles southeast of San Francisco in the San Joaquin Valley, California's agricultural heartland.

Relatives of Salgado contacted authorities reporting that he had admitted to them he was involved with the kidnapping, Warnke told KFSN-TV on Tuesday.

## More Americans apply for unemployment benefits

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More Americans filed for unemployment benefits last week, but the labor market remains strong even in the face of persistent inflation and a slowing overall U.S. economy.

Jobless claims for the week ending Oct. 1 rose by 29,000 to 219,000, the Labor Department reported Thursday.

Last week's number was revised down by 3,000 to 190,000.

The four-week moving average inched up by 250 to 206,500.

The total number of Americans collecting unemployment aid rose by 15,000 to 1.36 million for the week ending Sept. 24.

Applications for jobless aid generally reflect layoffs, which have remained historically low since the initial purge of more than 20 million jobs at the start of the coronavirus pandemic in the spring of 2020.

Recent employment data has indicated that the job market may be cooling slightly, an important consideration for the

Federal Reserve when it meets early next month to decide whether to raise its main lending rate again.

On Tuesday, the government reported that the number of available jobs in the U.S. plummeted in August compared with July as businesses grow less desperate for workers, a trend that could put a dent in chronically high inflation.

Payroll processor ADP said Wednesday that businesses added 208,000 jobs in September, ahead of analysts' estimates of 200,000, but below the 250,000 that Wall Street expects the government to report in September jobs data coming Friday.

The ADP survey does not always mirror the government's tally.

The Federal Reserve is aiming to bring down inflation by raising its key interest rate, which is currently in a range of 3% to 3.25%.

A little more than six months ago, that rate was near zero.



# Dozens killed in rampage at Thai day care

Associated Press

BANGKOK — A former policeman facing a drug charge burst into a day care center in northeastern Thailand on Thursday, killing dozens of preschoolers and teachers before shooting more people as he fled in the deadliest rampage in the nation's history.

The assailant, who was fired from the force earlier this year, took his own life after killing his wife and child at home.

A witness said staff at the day care locked the door when they

saw the assailant approaching with a gun, but he shot his way in. At least 36 people were killed in the attack in one of the poorest parts of Thailand, according to police spokesman Archayon Kraithong.

"The teacher who died, she had a child in her arms," the witness, whose name wasn't given, told Thailand's Kom Chad Luek television. "I didn't think he would kill children, but he shot at the door and shot right through it."

A video taken by a first re-

sponder arriving at the scene of the single-story day care in the rural town of Nongbua Lamphu showed rescuers rushing in to the building past the shattered glass front door, with drops of blood visible on the ground.

In footage posted online after the attack, frantic family members could be heard weeping outside the building, and one image showed the floor of a room smeared with blood where sleeping mats were scattered. Pictures of the alphabet and other colorful decorations

adorned the walls.

Police identified the suspect as 34-year-old former police officer Panya Kamrap. Police Maj. Gen. Paisal Luesomboon told PPTV in an interview that he was fired from the force earlier this year because of the drug charge.

In a Facebook posting, Thai police chief Gen. Dumrongsak Kittiprapas said the man, who had been a sergeant, was due in court on Friday for a hearing in the case involving methamphetamine possession.

## Analysis: At least 66 clinics in US have halted abortions

Associated Press

At least 66 clinics in 15 states have stopped providing abortions since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, according to an analysis released Thursday.

The number of clinics providing abortions in the 15 states dropped from 79 before the June 24 decision to 13 as of Oct. 2, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights.

All 13 of the remaining clinics are in Georgia. The other states have no providers offering abortions, though some of their clinics are offering care other than abortions.

Nationally, there were more than 800 abortion clinics in 2020, the institute said.

"Much more research will need to be conducted to grasp the full extent of the chaos, confusion and harm that the U.S. Supreme Court has unleashed on people needing abortions, but the picture that is starting to emerge should alarm anyone who supports reproductive freedom and the right to bodily autonomy," said Rachel Jones, a Guttmacher researcher.

The new report does not include data on hospitals and phy-

sician offices that provided abortions and stopped them after the court ruling, but Jones noted that clinics provide most U.S. abortions, including procedures and dispensing abortion medication. Recent Guttmacher data show just over half of U.S. abortions are done with medication.

States without abortion providers are concentrated in the South. In some of those places, many women seeking abortions would need to travel so far that the journey will be impossible, Jones said.

Dr. Jeanne Corwin, who provides abortions in Indiana and Ohio, said clinic closures "will result in immeasurable harm to women's physical health, mental health and financial health."

In several states, access is under threat because bans were put on hold only temporarily by court injunctions. These include Indiana, Ohio and South Carolina, the analysis found.

"It is precarious from a medical standpoint and certainly from a business standpoint," said Dr. Katie McHugh, an OB-GYN who provides abortions in Indiana. "It's difficult to keep the doors open and the lights on when you don't know if you're going to be a felon tomorrow."

## Colo. baker fighting ruling over gender transition cake

Associated Press

DENVER — The Colorado baker who won a partial Supreme Court victory after refusing on religious grounds to make a gay couple's wedding cake a decade ago is challenging a separate ruling he violated the state's anti-discrimination law by refusing to make a cake celebrating a gender transition.

A lawyer for Jack Phillips on Wednesday urged Colorado's appeals court — largely on procedural grounds — to overturn last year's ruling in a lawsuit brought by a transgender woman.

The woman, Autumn Scardina, called Phillips' suburban Denver cake shop in 2017 requesting a birthday cake that had blue frosting on the outside and was pink inside to celebrate her gender transition. At trial last year, Phillips, a Christian, testified he did not think someone could change genders and he would not celebrate "somebody who thinks that they can."

Jake Warner, an attorney representing Phillips from the conservative Christian legal advocacy group Alliance Defending Freedom, said the ruling was wrong. He said requiring Phillips to create a cake with a message contrary to his religious be-

liefs amounts to forcing him to say something he does not believe, violating his right to free speech.

Judge Timothy Schutz noted Phillips' wife initially told Scardina the bakery could make the cake before Scardina volunteered that the design was meant to celebrate her gender transition.

One of Scardina's lawyers, John McHugh, said Scardina did not ask the shop to endorse her idea, just sell her a cake that they would sell anyone else.

In 2018, the Supreme Court ruled that the Colorado Civil Rights Commission had acted with anti-religious bias in enforcing the anti-discrimination law against Phillips after he refused to bake a cake celebrating the wedding of Charlie Craig and Dave Mullins in 2012. The justices called the commission unfairly dismissive of Phillips' religious beliefs.

The high court did not rule then on the larger issue of whether a business can invoke religious objections to refuse service to LGBTQ people.

But it will get another chance when it hears a different case in coming months challenging Colorado's anti-discrimination law.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Man charged with damaging Joplin House**

**MO** ST. LOUIS — A man was charged Tuesday with breaking into the historic home of ragtime composer Scott Joplin and causing tens of thousands of dollars' worth of damage.

Kevin Daley-Bey, 38, faces one count each of second-degree burglary and first-degree property damage.

Police said several windows were busted and artifacts were damaged Sunday morning at the Scott Joplin House. Damage also was reported at a construction building less than a block away.

**Employee charged in campus bomb hoax**

**MA** BOSTON — A Northeastern University employee who said he was injured when a package he was opening on the Boston campus exploded last month was charged Tuesday with fabricating the incident.

Jason Duhaime, who is the new technology manager and director of the university's Immersive Media Lab, was charged with "conveying false and misleading information related to an explosive device" and then lying to federal investigators, according to court documents.

Duhaime told investigators that the hard plastic case exploded when he opened it on Sept. 13, causing "sharp" objects to fly from the case and injure his arms, but his arms only had superficial marks and there was no damage to his shirt, investigators said.

According to the FBI affidavit, "The inside and outside of the case did not bear any marks, dents, cracks, holes, or other signs that it had been exposed to a forceful or explosive discharge of any type or magnitude."

The case also contained a rambling note that include a threat to "destroy" the lab. But the affidavit said the typed letter "bore no tears, holes, burn marks, or any other indication that it had been near any sort of forceful or explosive discharge."

Investigators also discovered a word-for-word, electronic copy of the letter stored in a backup folder on a university computer in Duhaime's office.

The affidavit did not suggest a motive.

**5 Legionnaires' disease cases, one fatal, in state**

**VT** ST. ALBANS — The Vermont Health Department has confirmed five cases of Legionnaire's disease in Franklin County, including one death, but the source of the infection is unknown, it said Tuesday.

The cases were reported between Aug. 12 and Aug. 29 and appear to be clustered in the St. Albans area, the department said. The person who died was in their 70s, it said.

The general risk to residents is very low: Most healthy people exposed to the bacteria do not get sick, the Health Department said. The disease can be treated with antibiotics.

Air-conditioning units for large buildings, hot tubs, cooling misters, decorative fountains or plumbing systems are

common sources of infection, officials said.

**Young deputy fatally shot by friendly fire**

**FL** POLK CITY — A 21-year deputy appeared to have been fatally shot by friendly fire from deputies with whom he was serving a warrant in central Florida early Tuesday, authorities said.

The Polk County Sheriff's Office said in a statement that Deputy Blane Lane was shot in the left arm and chest at a trailer in Polk City while serving a warrant with three other deputies on a suspect wanted for failing to appear on a felony drug charge.

Two of the deputies fired their guns when the suspect was found with what they thought was a handgun pointed at them, and "the round that struck Lane came from one of their firearms," the sheriff's office statement said.

The suspect, Cheryl William, who was holding a BB gun, also was hit multiple times. She is in stable condition at a hospital.

She faces a felony second degree murder charge, among other charges, the sheriff's office said.

**Tornado damages homes, power lost in dust storms**

**AZ** WILLIAMS — Up to 10 homes were damaged after a tornado touched down in northern Arizona on Monday while around Phoenix, dust storms caused downed power lines, fires and cut power to thousands, authorities said.

The National Weather Service said a strong line of thunderstorms hit northwestern Co-

conino County around 1:30 p.m.

County officials said 8 to 10 homes were damaged 8 miles north of Williams, which is 33 miles west of Flagstaff. Numerous other structures and trees were damaged by the up to 100 mph winds in the EF-1 twister, according to the weather agency.

Dust storms, rain and wind moved through the Phoenix area Monday afternoon, downing power lines that sparked fires and cut power to thousands. The Phoenix Fire Department at about 5:30 p.m. reported on Twitter that firefighters were responding to more than a half-dozen fires in homes, businesses and in a salvage yard.

**Hollywood sign gets some TLC before centennial**

**CA** LOS ANGELES — The Hollywood sign is getting a makeover befitting its status as a Tinseltown icon.

After a pressure-wash and some rust removal, workers this week began using 250 gallons of primer and white paint to spruce up the sign ahead of its centennial next year. The entire renovation effort is expected to take up to eight weeks.

Originally built in 1923, the sign read "Hollywoodland" to promote a property development. But after decades of neglect, the original sign was shortened to read "Hollywood" and then was replaced altogether with a new sign in 1978.

The 45-foot-tall sign in the Hollywood Hills above Los Angeles is repainted every decade.

— From wire reports



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**Reporting World, National and Military News**

# Arraez, McNeil win MLB batting titles

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Minnesota's Luis Arraez got a Louis Vuitton roller bag from Carlos Correa. The New York Mets' Jeff McNeil is being gifted a car by Francisco Lindor.

Winning batting titles on the final day of the season was rewarding.

"I couldn't sleep last night, just thinking and thinking about it," Arraez said after edging the New York Yankees' Aaron Judge on Wednesday to become American League batting champion. "I'm living a dream right now. This is amazing for me because I worked hard for this."

Arraez finished with a .316 average after going 1-for-1 with a pair of walks against the Chicago White Sox, the lowest average for an AL batting champion since Boston's Carl Yastrzemski at .301 in 1968. Correa gave him the luxury luggage on Wednesday.

"He sets an example for us," Arraez said. "He's a leader, and I love that guy a lot."

Judge was held out by Yankees manager Aaron Boone, a day after hitting his AL record 62nd home run to break the mark Roger Maris set in 1961. Judge missed out on a Triple Crown.

McNeil made it first-time batting champions in both leagues, his .326 average one point ahead of the Los Angeles Dodgers' Freddie Freeman.

McNeil sat out until the eighth inning of the regular-season finale against Washington and did not have a plate appearance. Needing to go 4-for-4 to catch McNeil, Freeman doubled and homered in his first two at-bats against Colorado.

"You get a little bit nervous," McNeil said. "Four hits is normal for him."

Freeman's flyout to the warning track in

center field in the fifth ended his hopes on a 3-for-4 afternoon.

"One of my goals in baseball is to win a batting title," said McNeil, who topped .300 three times before slumping to .251 last year. "I wanted to get back to who I am."

Lindor couldn't recall the what prompted his auto promise.

"It's rare when McNeil is upset," Lindor said. "And I just said, 'If you win the batting title, I'll get you a car.' So, yeah. It was a long time ago. Everybody has to make sure I haven't forgot, and everybody's making sure I buy him a car. I will get him a car. I didn't specify what car it was."

Said McNeil: "Hopefully it's something pretty cool."

The overall major league batting average of .243 was the lowest since the record bottom of .237 in 1968, the last season before the pitcher's mound was lowered. MLB will ban defensive shifts starting next year, a move likely to help hitters.

In a season that highlighted baseball's haves and have-nots, four teams finished with 100 wins, tying the record set in 2019: the Dodgers (111), Houston (106), Atlanta and the New York Mets (101 each). In addition, the Yankees won 99 before losing their final two.

The Dodgers had the most wins in the NL since the 1906 Chicago Cubs went 116-36.

Four teams had 100 or more losses for only the fourth time after 2002, 2019 and 2021: Washington (107), Oakland (102), Pittsburgh and Cincinnati (100 each).

Judge hit an AL record 62 homers, breaking Roger Maris' mark from 1961, and Philadelphia's Kyle Schwarber topped the NL with 46. The 16-homer gap between first

and second in the major leagues was the most since Jimmie Foxx had 17 more than Babe Ruth in 1932.

Judge and the Mets' Pete Alonso tied for the big league lead in RBIs with 131.

Houston's Justin Verlander finished with the AL's lowest ERA at 1.75, adding to the 2011 ERA title he won with Detroit. He became the second pitcher to lead the major leagues at age 39 or older after 42-year-old Roger Clemens in 2005. Verlander also led the AL in wins, going 18-4.

The Dodgers' Julio Urias topped the NL at 2.16.

Miami's Sandy Alcantara was second at 2.28 and pitched 228⅓ innings. That was 23⅓ innings more than Philadelphia's Aaron Nola, who was second with 205 — the largest gap between first and second in the majors since Phil Niekro led by 49⅓ innings in 1979. Alcantara also pitched six of the major leagues' 36 complete games — the previous low for a full season was 42 in 2018.

Atlanta's Kyle Wright led the NL with 21 wins.

Shohei Ohtani went 15-9 with a 2.33 ERA for the Los Angeles Angels and 219 strikeouts in 166 innings, and he hit .273 with 34 homers and 95 RBIs. Ohtani became the first player with 10 wins and 30 homers in the same season and also the first to qualify as a hitter and a pitcher since the qualification rule for batters began in 1950.

The Yankees' Gerrit Cole won his second AL strikeout title with 257, and Milwaukee's Corbin Burnes led the NL with 243.

Miami's Jon Berti led the NL with 41 steals and Baltimore's Jorge Mateo topped the AL with 35, one more than teammate Cedric Mullins.

## Kansas City fires manager Matheny after finishing 65-97

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Manager Mike Matheny and pitching coach Cal Eldred were fired by the Kansas City Royals on Wednesday night, shortly after the struggling franchise finished the season 65-97 with a listless 9-2 loss to the Cleveland Guardians.

The Royals had exercised their option on Matheny's contract for 2023 during spring training, when the club hoped it was turning the corner from also-ran to contender. But plagued by poor pitching, struggles from young position players and a lackluster

group of veterans, the Royals were largely out of playoff contention by the middle of summer.

The disappointing on-field product led owner John Sherman last month to fire longtime front office executive Dayton Moore, the architect of back-to-back American League champions and the 2015 World Series title team. He was replaced by one of his longtime understudies, J.J. Picollo, who made the decision to fire Matheny hours after the season ended.

"Managing the Royals has been a true privilege," Matheny said in a statement.

"I'm thankful to so many, primarily Dayton Moore, and the coaches and players I've worked with. I would like to thank Mr. John Sherman and the ownership group for the opportunity to manage their team, and everyone involved in this great organization.

"I came to the Royals knowing it was an organization of excellence and care, and was shown that care every single day. Royals fans should be excited about this group of players, and I look forward to watching them continue to grow."

Matheny finished 165-219 during his time with the Royals.



# Rested Volunteers to face true test

*Associated Press*

Neyland Stadium is selling out again and fans already are trying to plan how to paint a visiting stadium orange and white to cap Tennessee's regular season.

That's how good things are going for eighth-ranked Tennessee in coach Josh Heupel's second season.

The true test of just how good these Volunteers might be this season starts Saturday at No. 25 LSU.

Then they host No. 1 Alabama. There's a final break from the usual Southeastern Conference juggernaut against UT Martin before hosting No. 13 Kentucky and then a trip to Athens to play defending national champ and No. 2 Georgia.

At a university where the men's basketball team won the SEC Tournament title in March, women's basketball reached their first Sweet 16 since 2016 and the baseball team spent much of the season ranked No. 1, it's about time the football program started pulling its weight around campus.

Heupel says success is breeding more success across the board.

"The passion of our fan base is obviously felt by our football program, but it is felt by everybody," Heupel said. "There is a ton of excitement that surrounds Knoxville, the state of Tennessee and Vol Nation. ... When

it's going good, your logo is in front of everybody all year long, 365 days out of the year."

Being ranked at all, let alone in the top 10, didn't seem possible in late January 2021. Heupel had just been hired shortly after the university chancellor announced she fired his predecessor and nine others over "shocking" recruiting violations. The Vols went 16-19 in Jeremy Pruitt's three seasons.

"The energy is different than when I first got here inside of the building," Heupel said. "You can feel that, and it is because of the atmosphere that has been created across all sports."

Tennessee is 10-6 since Heupel took over, and he is the first coach since the AP Top 25 started in 1936 to beat a top-20 team on the road in each of his first two seasons.

Helping Heupel get the Vols back on the track has been quarterback Hendon Hooker, a player Heupel persuaded to stick around after transferring from Virginia Tech. Hooker threw for 31 touchdowns with three interceptions and 2,945 yards last season.

Now Hooker is running the nation's top offense with 559.2 yards per game and the fourth-best scoring unit putting up 48.4 points a game. He is averaging 298.2 yards passing per game with eight TDs and no interceptions with three TD runs this season.

He threw for 349 yards and two TDs and ran for 112 yards more with another score in Tennessee's 38-33 victory over then-No. 20 Florida on Sept. 24, only the Vols' second win in that series in 18 years. Heupel says there's room for Hooker to grow more.

"Sometimes it looks easy because we are playing at a really high level," Heupel said. "It is not easy, and he is just in so much command of what we are doing. He understands the why behind everything, and that is a big part of it."

How big a leap Tennessee makes in Heupel's second season depends heavily on a defense that is giving up 407 yards per game. The Vols' scoring defense has been better, allowing just 19 points a game in a stat padded with two wins over Mid-American Conference teams.

Heupel said the Vols know what they need to do better, starting with tackling, assignments and simply knowing what they're supposed to do.

The Vols are coming off an open date, when they worked on those issues and healed ahead of the meat of their SEC slate.

"To see how it's changed from when I first got here to what it is now is just crazy," defensive lineman Omari Thomas said. "It's something we want to just keep doing, honestly, and get better and better every week."

## Kansas' Leipold downplays links to Wisconsin

*Associated Press*

LAWRENCE, Kan. — The long-suffering football fans at Kansas mostly thought it flattering when Nebraska fired Scott Frost and rumors began that the Huskers would be interested in hiring the Jayhawks' Lance Leipold as their next coach.

When Wisconsin fired its coach this week? The feeling wasn't so much flattery as fear.

Leipold was born in the small town of Jefferson, about a 40-minute drive from Camp Randall Stadium in Madison, and he's about as Wisconsin as summer sausage and cheese. Leipold played college football at Wisconsin-Whitewater, the Division III school where he later got his coaching start and won six national championships as a head coach. He also spent three seasons working for Barry Alvarez in the early 1990s as a graduate assistant with the Badgers.

So while the ties between Leipold and

Nebraska were tenuous at best — he coached at tiny NAIA school Doane and the since-disbanded program at Nebraska-Omaha — the links Leipold has to Wisconsin run deep.

"We're happy here. We have no plans on going anywhere," Leipold said Tuesday, when asked by The Associated Press about the interest he's generated with the first 5-0 start at Kansas since 2009 — the one that has the Jayhawks ranked No. 19 as they head into this weekend's game of unbeaten against No. 17 TCU.

"Anything else is rumors," Leipold continued. "Some of these things are happening while we're in the film room — I didn't even know some of the stuff Sunday until later in the evening, when I'm getting all these text messages. I had no idea."

He's referring to Wisconsin firing Paul Chryst, who was born in Madison and played quarterback for the Badgers before getting into coaching at Division III Wis-

consin-Platteville and elsewhere before returning to Madison to take on the head coaching job in 2015.

Chryst was fired Sunday and replaced by defensive coordinator Jim Leonhard, a former Wisconsin star who will serve the rest of the season as interim coach.

Kansas will do everything it can to keep Leipold, whom it plucked from Buffalo on the heels of the failed Les Miles experiment in Lawrence. Leipold was rewarded with a one-year extension in May despite having won just two games last season.

As part of that extension, the average annual value of the 58-year-old's contract was bumped to \$2.6 million. He's still the lowest-paid Big 12 coach by a wide margin.

But Kansas is seizing on the momentum of a program more accustomed to 10-loss seasons than ones in which it wins five games. ESPN is bringing "College GameDay" to Lawrence for the first time Saturday.

# Rams' Stafford battling through sacks

*Associated Press*

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. — Matthew Stafford has been one of the NFL's most durable quarterbacks over the past dozen years of his career despite getting sacked a whopping 444 times in his 14 seasons in the league.

The past 16 sacks have happened in the Los Angeles Rams' first four games of the new season, but Stafford doesn't think there's any reason to be worried about his health — even on a short week of preparation before playing behind a patchwork offensive line against the Dallas Cowboys' impressive pass rush.

That's because in Stafford's experience, hits and injuries are maddeningly unconnected.

"Every NFL game presents its own challenge when it comes to bumps and bruises," Stafford said Wednesday. "You never know how it's going to shake out. There's games where I feel like I never get touched, but one thing rolls you up and hurts you. And other games where you get hit more often and you

feel decent coming out of it. I feel good (now). I just do everything I can to get myself ready."

Only Carson Wentz has been sacked more times this season than Stafford, who has also gone two straight weeks without throwing a touchdown pass. He threw for at least one score in each of his first 23 games with the Rams (2-2), who bet their franchise's future on him in their trade with Detroit early last year.

The bet already paid off splendidly with last season's Super Bowl title, but if the Rams have any hope of a repeat, they probably need to keep Stafford upright and unbothered more often — particularly against elite teams such as Buffalo and San Francisco, who accounted for 14 of those 16 sacks.

"A couple of those were just mental errors that are uncharacteristic for our (blockers) to make," coach Sean McVay said. "We want to try to minimize the amount of times that our quarterback is getting hit. The way that both those games have kind of unfolded, that is not ideal. That is something that we take a

lot of pride in, and we've got to be able to clean it up."

Stafford was pressured 22 times by San Francisco, according to the NFL's Next Gen stats. That's the most pressures against any quarterback in a game this season, and it's tied for the second-most pressures allowed by the Rams since 2014.

Stafford was pressured at least 23% of the time in all four of the Rams' games this season. At least the pressures haven't damaged his completion rate, which sits at a career-high 70.7%.

Injuries and turnover on the Rams' offensive line likely are more responsible for Stafford's burgeoning sack total than anything the quarterback himself is doing, but that will be of little comfort with Micah Parsons, DeMarcus Lawrence and Dante Fowler bearing down on him Sunday.

Los Angeles might face the Cowboys on Sunday with three preseason third-stringers starting across the interior line to cover for the definite absences of center Brian Allen (knee) and right guard Coleman Shelton.

# Harvick fined for alleged infractions on Next Gen car

*Associated Press*

CONCORD, N.C. — NASCAR on Wednesday levied a heavy fine against Kevin Harvick, one of the most outspoken drivers about safety concerns on the Next Gen car, for alleged modifications found on his Ford at Talladega Superspeedway.

NASCAR docked both Harvick and Stewart-Haas Racing 100 points each, fined crew chief Rodney Childers \$100,000 and suspended Childers for the next four races. NASCAR said the penalties were for "modification of a single source supplied part."

"Seems strange," Harvick tweeted minutes before the penalty was announced.

NASCAR has a reputation for making things difficult for teams that for various reasons the sanctioning body finds out of line. Harvick's rants last week about the safety of the Next Gen car may have been

why the No. 4 Ford was selected to be taken from Talladega to its North Carolina R&D Center for a deeper inspection.

NASCAR maintains that the selection of cars for post-race inspection at the R&D Center is done randomly. Competitors believe there's nothing random about the process.

"Shocking," Childers sarcastically replied to NASCAR's tweet announcing the penalty.

NASCAR President Steve Phelps, after speaking on a Women in Motorsports panel at Charlotte Motor Speedway, said there was nothing punitive in the penalty to the No. 4 team.

"I would say that's ridiculous. No one has a vendetta against Kevin Harvick or Rodney, at all, or anyone at Stewart-Haas Racing," Phelps said. "Our guys are very good. They are going to look at (an infraction). Look at it again. Look at it a third time to make sure there's a penalty and the penal-

ty is right. If the four team thinks that's not right, they will file an appeal."

Phelps said he did know what part SHR allegedly modified. Asked by The Associated Press if it was possible that Childers, who was crew chief Sunday in his 600th Cup race, modified the stiff rear clip under scrutiny in an attempt to soften it, Phelps said that was not the part in question.

The Next Gen has been under increased scrutiny the since the playoffs began in September with four consecutive races in which the car had issues. From car fires (Harvick's caught fire in the playoff opener), parts failures and tire failures, the Next Gen struggled to hold up in playoff competition.

But the bigger issue was the stiffness in the rear of the car, which has contributed to concussions for both Alex Bowman and Kurt Busch. Bowman is out for a second consecutive

week and Busch will miss his 12th straight race on Sunday. Cody Shane Ware also will sit out Sunday's race at Charlotte Motor Speedway because of a broken foot he suffered in a crash two races ago — meaning three drivers will miss a race because of injuries for the first time in at least two decades.

Chase Elliott, NASCAR's most popular driver, has accused NASCAR of taking a step backward in safety because of the stiffness of the car. Because one of the goals of the Next Gen was to reduce costs, the new car is extremely stiff in order to withstand crashes and reduce the size of the fleets that teams need for a 38-race season.

NASCAR on Wednesday was scheduled to crash-test computer models of changes that potentially can be made to the rear of the car to help redistribute the energy away from the driver during a crash.