

Biden warns of a nuclear ‘Armageddon’

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President Joe Biden is declaring that the risk of nuclear “Armageddon” is at the highest level since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, as Russian officials speak of using tactical nuclear weapons after suffering massive setbacks in the eight-month invasion of Ukraine.

Speaking at a Democratic fundraiser, Biden said Thursday night that Russian President Vladimir Putin is “a guy I know fairly well” and the Russian leader is “not joking when he talks about the use of tactical nuclear weapons or biological or chemical weapons.”

Biden added, “We have not faced the prospect of Armageddon since Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis.” He suggested the threat from Putin is real “because his military is — you might say — significantly underperforming.”

U.S. officials for months have warned of the prospect that Russia could use weapons of mass destruction in Ukraine as it has faced strategic setbacks on the battlefield, though Biden’s remarks marked the starkest warnings yet by the U.S. government about the nuclear stakes.

Still, nothing has changed in U.S. intelli-

gence assessments that in recent weeks have shown no evidence that Putin has imminent plans to deploy nuclear weapons, according to U.S. officials.

One official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, added that Biden was speaking broadly about the administration’s growing concerns about Putin’s threats.

Biden was conveying that the White House sees Putin’s rhetoric as “reckless and irresponsible” and is taking it seriously, the official said. The official added that Biden’s remarks are in line with warnings he’s made in speeches at the U.N. General Assembly and that other senior administration officials have made recently.

The president’s new remarks came after White House officials this week said they have seen no change to Russia’s nuclear forces that would require a change in the alert posture of U.S. nuclear forces: “We have not seen any reason to adjust our own strategic nuclear posture, nor do we have indication that Russia is preparing to imminently use nuclear weapons,” White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Tuesday.

The 13-day showdown in 1962 that followed the U.S. discovery of the Soviet Union’s secret deployment of nuclear weapons to Cuba is regarded by experts as the closest the world has ever come to nuclear annihilation. The crisis during President John F. Kennedy’s administration sparked a renewed focus on arms control on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Biden on Thursday also challenged Russian nuclear doctrine, warning that the use of a lower-yield tactical weapon could quickly spiral out of control into global destruction.

“I don’t think there is any such a thing as the ability to easily use a tactical nuclear weapon and not end up with Armageddon,” Biden said.

He added that he was still “trying to figure” out Putin’s “off-ramp” in Ukraine.

“Where does he find a way out?” Biden asked. “Where does he find himself in a position that he does not only lose face but lose significant power within Russia?”

Putin has repeatedly alluded to using his country’s vast nuclear arsenal, including last month when he announced plans to conscript Russian men to serve in Ukraine.

US, UK hold waterborne drone drill in Persian Gulf

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The U.S. Navy held a joint drone drill with the United Kingdom on Friday in the Persian Gulf, testing the same unmanned surveillance ships that Iran twice has seized in recent months in the Middle East.

The exercise comes as the U.S. Navy separately told commercial shippers in the wider Mideast that it would continue using drones in the region and warned against interfering with their operations.

The drone drill — and the American pledge to keep sailing them — also comes as tensions between the U.S. and Iran on the seas remain high amid stalled negotiations over its tattered nuclear deal with world powers and as protests sweep the Islamic Republic.

Friday’s drill involved two American and

two British warships in the Persian Gulf, as well as three Saildrone Explorers, said Cmdr. Timothy Hawkins, a spokesman for the Navy’s Mideast-based 5th Fleet.

The drones searched for a target on the seas, then sent the still images its cameras captured back to both the warships and the 5th Fleet’s command center in the island kingdom of Bahrain. There, an artificial intelligence system worked through the photos.

The 5th Fleet launched its unmanned Task Force 59 last year. Drones used by the Navy include ultra-endurance aerial surveillance drones, surface ships like the Sea Hawk and the Sea Hunter and smaller underwater drones that resemble torpedoes.

But of particular interest for the Navy has been the Saildrone Explorer, a commercial-available drone that can stay at sea for

long periods of time. That’s crucial for a region that has some 5,000 miles of coastline from the Suez Canal, down the Red Sea to the Gulf of Oman, the Strait of Hormuz and into the Persian Gulf.

It’s a vast territory that stretches the reach of the Navy and its allies and has seen a series of attacks amid the atomic accord’s collapse. It also remains crucial to global shipping and energy supplies, as a fifth of all oil traded passes through the Strait of Hormuz.

“No matter what forces you have, you can’t cover all that,” Hawkins said. “You have to do that in a partnered way and an innovative way.”

But Iran, which long has equated America’s presence in the region to it patrolling the Gulf of Mexico, views the drones with suspicion.

Russia boosts attacks near nuke plant

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine—Russia concentrated attacks in its increasingly troubled invasion of Ukraine on areas it illegally annexed, including the Zaporizhzhia region that is home to Europe's largest nuclear power plant.

Fighting near the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant has alarmed the U.N.'s atomic energy watchdog. An accident there could release 10 times the potentially lethal radiation than the world's worst nuclear disaster, at Chernobyl in Ukraine 36 years ago, Ukrainian Environmental Protection Minister Ruslan Strilets said Friday.

"The situation with the occupation, shelling and mining of the Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plants by Russian troops is causing consequences that will have a global character," Strilets told The Associated Press.

The city of Zaporizhzhia, the region's administrative center, is 33 miles from the nuclear plant and remains under Ukrainian control. To cement Russia's claim to the region, Russian forces bombarded the city with S-300 missiles on Thursday.

Russia was reported to have converted the S-300 from its original use as a long-range anti-aircraft weapon into a missile for ground attacks because of a shortage of other, more suitable weapons.

Ukrainian authorities said the death toll

from the strikes rose to 12 on Friday, while another 12 people who were wounded in the bombardment of apartments remained hospitalized.

Missiles also struck the city overnight, injuring one person, Zaporizhzhia Gov. Oleksandr Starukh said. Russia also used Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones there for the first time and damaged two infrastructure facilities, he said.

With its army losing ground to a Ukrainian counteroffensive in the country's south and east, Russia has increasingly deployed Iranian-made drones to attack Ukrainian targets. The unmanned, disposable "kamikaze drones" are cheaper and less sophisticated than missiles but are effective at damaging ground targets.

The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said Russia's use of the explosive-packed drones was unlikely to affect the course of the conflict significantly.

"They have used many drones against civilian targets in rear areas, likely hoping to generate nonlinear effects through terror. Such efforts are not succeeding," analysts at the think tank wrote.

In other Moscow-annexed areas, Russia's Defense Ministry reported Friday that its forces had repelled Ukrainian advances near the city of Lyman and retaken three villages elsewhere in the eastern Donetsk re-

gion. The ministry said Russian forces also had prevented Ukrainian troops from advancing on several villages in the Kherson region.

Some of the Russian military's equipment and weapons are getting into Ukrainians' hands. Ukraine's ability to capture and put back into service Russian tanks and other equipment has become an important factor in its counteroffensive.

Britain's Ministry of Defense said Friday that Ukrainian forces have captured at least 440 tanks and about 650 armored vehicles since the war started Feb. 24.

"The failure of Russian crews to destroy intact equipment before withdrawing or surrendering highlights their poor state of training and low levels of battle discipline," the British said.

Putin ordered a partial mobilization of Russian reservists last month to reinforce the front lines in Ukraine. Mistakes have dogged the call-up, however, and tens of thousands of would-be fighters have fled Russia.

Russia has been so desperate for troop reinforcements that it's turned to unusual sources. The Ukrainian military said Friday that 500 former criminals have been mobilized to reinforce Russian ranks in the eastern Donetsk region, where Ukrainian forces have retaken some territory.

US, Japan, S. Korea start ballistic missile defense drill

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

Warships from the United States, Japan and South Korea commenced a ballistic missile defense exercise Thursday in the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea, according to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

The drills came the same day North Korea fired a pair of short-range ballistic missiles off its eastern coast and two days after it launched an intermediate-range weapon over Japan.

Also Thursday, South Korea scrambled more than 30 aircraft in response to a dozen

North Korean warplanes flying near the South's border.

U.S. ships involved in Thursday's exercise were the guided-missile cruiser USS Chancellorsville and guided-missile destroyer USS Benfold, which are part of the USS Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group, the INDOPACOM release said.

The other vessels were Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyers JS Chokai and JS Ashigara and South Korea's destroyer ROKS Sejong the Great.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff announced Wednesday that the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Ronald Re-

agan and its strike group would redeploy to the South's eastern coast due to an uptick in North Korean activity. The group had made a port call in and around Busan on Sept. 23.

North Korea, known formally as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK, has launched roughly 40 missiles so far this year, a record.

"The United States, [South Korea] and Japan strongly condemn the DPRK's launches, which violate numerous, unanimous mandates of the United Nations Security Council," the INDOPACOM release said.

The exercise on Thursday

was intended to demonstrate "the strength of the trilateral relationship with our Japan and [South Korea] allies, which is forward-leaning, reflective of our shared values, and resolute against those who challenge regional stability," the release said.

The three nations carried out trilateral anti-submarine warfare drills in waters between Japan and the Korean Peninsula late last month "to cope with the North Korean nuclear and missile threat," South Korea's Ministry of National Defense said in a news release on Sept. 29.

Hurricane Ian evacuees begin returning home

Associated Press

SANIBEL ISLAND, Fla. — Rotting fish and garbage lie scattered in Sanibel Island's streets. On the mainland, debris from washed-away homes is heaped in a canal like matchsticks. Huge shrimp boats sit perched amid the remains of a mobile home park.

"Think of a snow globe. Pick it up and shake it — that's what happened," said Fred Szott.

For the past three days, he and his wife Joyce have been making trips to their damaged mobile home in Fort Myers, cleaning up after Hurricane Ian slammed into Florida's Gulf Coast.

As for the emotional turbulence, he says: "You either hold on, or you lose it."

The number of storm-related deaths rose to at least 101 on Thursday, eight days after the storm made landfall in southwest Florida. According to reports from the Florida Medical Examiners Commission, 98 of those deaths were in Florida. Five people were also killed in North Carolina, three in Cuba and one in Virginia.

Ian is the second-deadliest storm to hit the mainland United States in the 21st century, behind Hurricane Katrina, which left more than 1,800 people dead in 2005. The deadliest hurricane ever to hit the U.S. was

the Great Galveston Hurricane in 1900 that killed as many as 8,000 people.

Residents of Florida's devastated barrier islands are starting to return, assessing the damage to homes and businesses despite limited access to some areas.

The broken causeway to Sanibel Island might not be passable until the end of the month. In the meantime, residents like Pamela Brislin arrived by boat to see what they could salvage.

Brislin stayed through the storm, but is haunted by what happened afterward. When she checked on a neighbor, she found the woman crying. Her husband had passed away, his body laid out on a picnic table until help could arrive. Another neighbor's house caught fire. The flames were so large that they forced Breslin to do what the hurricane could not — flee with her husband and a neighbor's dog.

Ian, a Category 4 storm with sustained winds of 150 miles per hour, unleashed torrents of rain and caused extensive flooding and damage. The deluge turned streets into gushing rivers. Backyard waterways overflowed into neighborhoods, sometimes by more than a dozen feet, tossing boats onto yards and roadways. Beaches disappeared, as ocean surges pushed shorelines far inland.

US adds 263K jobs in September

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — America's employers slowed their hiring in September but still added a solid 263,000 jobs — a dose of encouraging news that may mean the Federal Reserve's drive to cool the job market and ease inflation is starting to make progress.

Friday's government report showed that last month's job growth was down from 315,000 in August and that the unemployment rate fell from 3.7% to 3.5%, matching a half-century low.

September's slightly more moderate pace of hiring may be welcomed by the Fed, which is trying to restrain the economy enough to tame the worst inflation in four decades without causing a recession. Slower job growth would mean less pressure on employers to raise pay and pass those costs

on to their customers through price increases — a recipe for high inflation.

The public anxiety that has arisen over high prices and the prospect of a recession is also carrying political consequences as President Joe Biden's Democratic Party struggles to maintain control of Congress in November's midterm elections.

In its epic battle to rein in inflation, the Fed has raised its benchmark interest rate five times this year. It is aiming to slow economic growth enough to reduce annual price increases back toward its 2% target.

It has a long way to go. In August, one key measure of year-over-year inflation, the consumer price index, amounted to 8.3%. And for now, consumer spending — the primary driver of the U.S. economy — is showing some resilience.

2 dead, 6 hurt in knife attack on Las Vegas Strip

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — An attacker with a large kitchen knife killed two people and wounded six others in stabbings along the Las Vegas Strip before he was arrested Thursday, police said.

Three people were hospitalized in critical condition and another three were in stable condition, according to Las Vegas police, who said they began receiving 911 calls about the stabbings around 11:40 a.m. across the street from the Wynn casino and hotel.

Yoni Barrios, 32, was booked into the Clark County Detention Center on two counts of murder and six counts of attempted murder, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department said in a statement.

It wasn't immediately known whether Barrios had a lawyer who could comment on his behalf.

Barrios, who is not a Las Vegas resident, was detained by Sands security guards and Metropolitan Police officers while running on a Strip sidewalk, police said.

"This was an isolated incident," Metropolitan Police Deputy Chief James LaRochelle said in a statement. "All evidence indicates Barrios acted alone and there are no outstanding suspects at this time."

Police said they were continuing to investigate the motive but do not believe there was an altercation before the attacks.

The Clark County coroner's office identified the victims who were killed as Brent Allan Hallett, 47, and Maris Mareen Digiovanani, 30, both Las Vegas residents.

The names of those wounded in the attack were not immediately released.

The initial stabbing was unprovoked and on the eastern sidewalk of Las Vegas Boulevard. The suspect then headed south and stabbed others, LaRochelle said.

The man fled and was followed by 911 callers before he was taken into custody, authorities said. Police recovered the "large knife with a long blade" believed to have been used, LaRochelle said, calling the case a "hard-to-comprehend murder investigation."

There were no other suspects in the case and "the Strip is secure," Clark County Sheriff Joe Lombardo said.

Democratic Gov. Steve Sisolak posted a message on social media saying, "Our hearts are with all those affected by this tragedy."

Nobel Peace Prize awarded to activists

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Activists from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia won the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday, a strong rebuke to Russian President Vladimir Putin whose invasion of Ukraine has outraged the international community and highlighted his authoritarian rule.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the 2022 prize to imprisoned Belarus rights activist Ales Bialiatski, the Russian group Memorial and the Ukrainian organization Center for Civil Liberties.

Berit Reiss-Andersen, chair

of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, said the panel wanted to honor “three outstanding champions of human rights, democracy and peaceful coexistence.”

“Through their consistent efforts in favor of human values and anti-militarism and principles of law, this year’s laureates have revitalized and honored Alfred Nobel’s vision of peace and fraternity between nations, a vision most needed in the world today,” she told reporters in Oslo.

Bialiatski was one of the leaders of the democracy movement in Belarus in the mid 1980s and

has continued to campaign for human rights and civil liberties in the authoritarian country. He founded the non-governmental organization Human Rights Center Viasna.

He was detained following protests in 2020 against the reelection of Belarus’ President Alexander Lukashenko, a close ally of Putin. He remains in jail without trial.

Memorial was founded in the Soviet Union in 1987 to ensure the victims of communist repression would be remembered. It has continued to compile information on human

rights abuses and tracked the fate of political prisoners in Russia. The country’s highest court ordered it shut down in December, the latest move in a relentless crackdown on rights activists, independent media and opposition supporters.

The Center for Civil Liberties was founded in 2007 to promote human rights and democracy in Ukraine during a period of turmoil in the country.

Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February, the group has worked to document Russian war crimes against Ukrainian civilians.

Biden pardons thousands of pot possession

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is pardoning thousands of Americans convicted of “simple possession” of marijuana under federal law, as his administration takes a dramatic step toward decriminalizing the drug and addressing charging practices that disproportionately impact people of color.

Biden’s move also covers thousands convicted of the crime in the District of Columbia. He is also calling on governors to issue similar pardons for those convicted of state marijuana offenses, which reflect the vast majority of marijuana possession cases.

Biden, in a statement, said the move reflects his position that “no one should be in jail just for using or possessing marijuana.”

“Too many lives have been upended because of our failed approach to marijuana,” he added. “It’s time that we right these wrongs.”

According to the White House, no one is currently in federal prison solely for “simple possession” of the drug, but the pardon could help thousands overcome obstacles to renting a home or finding a job.

“There are thousands of people who have prior Federal convictions for marijuana possession, who may be denied employment, housing, or educational opportu-

nities as a result,” he said. “My action will help relieve the collateral consequences arising from these convictions.”

The pardon does not cover convictions for possession of other drugs, or for charges relating to producing or possessing marijuana with an intent to distribute. Biden is also not pardoning non-citizens who were in the U.S. without legal status at the time of their arrest.

The announcement marks Biden’s reckoning with the impact of 1994 crime legislation, which he supported, that increased arrest and incarceration rates for drug crimes, particularly for Black and Latino people.

2 Russians seek asylum after reaching Alaska

Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska — Two Russians who said they fled the country to avoid military service have requested asylum in the U.S. after landing in a small boat on a remote Alaska island in the Bering Sea, U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski’s office said Thursday.

Karina Borger, a spokesperson for the Alaska Republican senator, said in an email that the office has been in communication with the U.S. Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection and that “the Russian nationals reported that they fled one of the coastal communities on the east coast of Russia to avoid compulsory military service.”

Thousands of Russian men have fled since

President Vladimir Putin announced a mobilization to bolster Russian forces in Ukraine. While Putin said the move was aimed at calling up about 300,000 men with past military service, many Russians fear it will be broad-

Spokespersons with the U.S. Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection referred a reporter’s questions to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security public affairs office, which provided little information Thursday. The office, in a statement, said the people “were transported to Anchorage for inspection, which includes a screening and vetting process, and then subsequently processed in accordance with applicable U.S. im-

migration laws under the Immigration and Nationality Act.”

The agency said the two Russians arrived Tuesday on a small boat. It did not provide details on where they came from, their journey or the asylum request. It was not immediately clear what kind of boat they were on.

Alaska’s senators, Republicans Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, on Thursday said the two Russians landed at a beach near the town of Gambell, an isolated Alaska Native community of about 600 people on St. Lawrence Island. Sullivan said he was alerted to the matter by a “senior community leader from the Bering Strait region” on Tuesday morning.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

3 charged in \$2.6M jewelry store robbery

CA LOS ANGELES — Three men were charged Wednesday with stealing more than \$2.6 million in a brazen smash-and-grab robbery at a Beverly Hills jewelry store, federal prosecutors said.

Jimmy Lee Vernon III, 31; Laddell Tharpe, 37; and Deshon Bell, 20, all of Long Beach, were each indicted on one count each of conspiracy and interference with commerce by robbery, which carry a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison for each count, the U.S. attorney's office said in a statement.

The three are accused of driving three cars, one of them reportedly stolen, to the Beverly Hills store on March 23, where Vernon and others allegedly smashed the exterior store cases with axes, sledgehammers and crowbars and ran off with dozens of bracelets, watches, necklaces and other items.

Vernon's cellphone fell out of his pocket during the robbery and law enforcement recovered it, authorities said.

Officer shoots armed man inside station

IL CHICAGO — A Chicago police officer shot an armed man who entered a police station on the city's West Side "ranting" anti-law enforcement statements on Wednesday, just days after an officer shot a man who infiltrated another police facility and pointed guns at officers, a department spokesman said.

Police Superintendent David Brown said during a news conference that the man walked in-

to the lobby of the Ogden District station shortly before 1 p.m. holding a plastic bag with what appeared to be the barrel of a gun sticking out of it.

Brown said the man was "ranting anti-police sentiments," and that when officers told him to drop the weapon, the man instead pointed it at officers, prompting approximately three of them to open fire. Brown said the man was shot at least once in the shoulder. The department said his injuries are not considered life threatening.

Bourbon tours on pace to set visitations record

KY FRANKFORT — The Kentucky Bourbon Trail is on a pace to surpass the record-high number of distillery visitations in a year, the Kentucky Distillers' Association said.

The continued rise in bourbon tourism means that distilleries along the Kentucky Bourbon Trail and Kentucky Bourbon Trail Craft Tour will likely exceed the record 1.7 million combined visits set in 2019, prior to pandemic-related shutdowns, the association said this week.

Many of Kentucky's iconic distilleries are asking visitors to book their tours well in advance because of the popularity of the visits, it said.

Law school sends out erroneous acceptances

MA BOSTON — A Massachusetts law school says it's guilty of accidentally sending acceptance emails to thousands of former and current applicants.

The Northeastern University School of Law in a statement Wednesday blamed a "technical error" for the glitch, saying the erroneous emails went to more than 200 people who applied for admission starting next fall, as well as to nearly 4,000 former applicants, some of whom are already enrolled.

"The School of Law quickly sent a clarifying email explaining the error. Individual outreach is also taking place to applicants with concerns," the Boston school said.

Final admissions decisions will not be made until later in the academic year.

"The School of Law deeply regrets this unintended mistake and is taking steps to ensure that it will not happen in the future," the school said.

Partially treated wastewater in river

MI ANN ARBOR — The City of Ann Arbor says an estimated 1.38 million gallons of partially treated wastewater flowed into the Huron River during maintenance Tuesday at its treatment plant.

The wastewater had received all treatment except disinfection, the city announced Wednesday in a news release.

The city notified the Washtenaw County Health Department and Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy of the discharge, it said.

The discharge marked the second incident threatening the quality of the river water in a little more than two months.

The state Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy cited auto trim maker

Tribar Manufacturing for discharging a plating solution containing hexavalent chromium into a sanitary sewer system over the weekend of July 29.

The solution ended up at a wastewater treatment facility that sends wastewater into a creek that flows into the Huron River system.

Hoax shooting calls upend school day

SC COLUMBIA — A wave of hoax emergency calls about school shootings across South Carolina sent hundreds of police officers into schools on Wednesday as scared students hid behind locked classroom doors.

The calls affected more than a dozen districts from Charleston to Greenville.

At least one 911 caller faked their caller ID information to make it seem like the call came from inside Blythewood High School, said Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott.

Lott said this information made the threat so real that he had no choice but to send waves of deputies, and to ask students and teachers to follow safety procedures.

"We had to respond the way we did," Lott said.

Other fake calls came into Burke High School in Charleston, Beaufort High School and at least four schools in Horry County on Wednesday morning.

Another wave of calls about non-existent shooters poured in throughout the day in places like Newberry, Greenville, Chester, Lancaster, Greenwood and other locations around the state, officials said.

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Uiagalelei having season of redemption

Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. — DJ Uiagalelei looked so confident and smooth that crisp fall afternoon in 2020 in his first college start against Boston College.

Nearly two years later, with the fifth-ranked Tigers (5-0, 3-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) heading to play the Eagles (2-3, 1-2) again on Saturday, Uiagalelei is just as poised — although these days he's armed with the experience of coming through difficult times on the field.

"It was definitely a surreal moment," Uiagalelei remembered. "I had no clue, but it was cool."

Uiagalelei's initial start came when national championship passer Trevor Lawrence was out with COVID-19. Uiagalelei dazzled that day, throwing for 342 yards and two touchdowns to lead the top-ranked Tigers from 18 points down to a 34-28 victory.

The next week, Uiagalelei passed for 439 yards — the most ever at Notre Dame Stadium — in a 47-40 loss to the Fighting Irish.

Lawrence returned soon after, but Uiagalelei's path was set. He was every bit the star he was projected to be since his early days at California high school power St. John Bosco.

Lawrence became the NFL Draft's No. 1 player taken and the Tigers belonged to Uiagalelei.

Uiagalelei's name was atop Heisman Trophy lists, he received lucrative NIL deals

and national TV commercials, but things devolved quickly for the 6-foot-5 Uiagalelei in 2021. Clemson lost twice in September and was out of contention for the ACC title, which it had won the previous six years.

Part of the blame was placed on Uiagalelei, who was tentative in his reads and inaccurate with throws. He completed less than 56% of his passes and ended with more interceptions than touchdowns (10 to nine).

Clemson's critics pounced, already pointing toward the team's next top prospect — backup freshman Cade Klubnik — to take control this season.

Uiagalelei paid no attention to the outsiders and continued to work to get better.

"No one wants to hear someone complain, whine, make excuses for something," he said this summer. "So, for me, I always want to put my head down and work. Just keep coming out there, keep putting my best effort forward and just working."

The approach that made Uiagalelei a football success didn't change, said Jason Negro, Uiagalelei's coach at St. John Bosco.

"That's the proudest thing I felt was that DJ didn't blame anyone else," Negro told The AP by phone. "He took the blame and kept putting the team first like he always has."

Uiagalelei, despite leading Clemson to a 10-3 mark and six straight wins to end the season, committed to improve. He pledged to lose weight — he dropped about 30

pounds from his peak weight last year to 230 this season — and refine his technique.

Uiagalelei has answered all the questions so far in Clemson's perfect start. He's thrown for 11 touchdowns — more than all of last year — and just one interception. Uiagalelei's completion percentage is up near 66% and he's run for three touchdowns.

"I've never been happier for a guy. The kid deserves it," Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said after Uiagalelei had five TD passes in a 51-45 overtime win at No. 15 Wake Forest on Sept. 24. "That's the guy we recruited, it's who he was in high school, and all these people forget about him and have written him off like he's some terrible player. He's not."

Negro said Uiagalelei never once lost belief in himself during the offseason. His old coaches and friends out West would tell him, don't worry. "He always assured me, 'Coach, watch, this season we're going to be a really good football team,'" Negro said.

With Uiagalelei in charge, the Tigers are among 16 undefeated teams left in college football's Bowl Subdivision and just one of two in the ACC. Gone, as well, are the calls for anyone else but Uiagalelei to lead Clemson's offense.

"It has been a little different because I have been playing a lot better," Uiagalelei said. "But for the most part I'm trying to keep my head down, keep my circle small, and look to get better each and every day."

After solid start, Sooners' Venables hits rough patch

Associated Press

NORMAN, Okla. — The party is over for Brent Venables.

Oklahoma's new football coach was welcomed at the Norman airport like a conquering hero when he arrived to replace USC-bound Lincoln Riley in December.

Venables seemed to be the perfect person to steady the program to fans who had been watching him ever since he left his job as an Oklahoma assistant after the 2011 season to become defensive coordinator at Clemson. Some had second thoughts when Venables vehemently approved of popular receivers coach Cale Gundy's resignation in August after Gundy said a "racially charged" word at a film session.

All seemed forgiven when Oklahoma got off to a 3-0 start that culminated with a 49-14 blowout of Nebraska, but things fell apart the next two weeks. The Sooners

lost at home to Kansas State, then were demolished 55-24 at TCU. Oklahoma has fallen out of the AP Top 25 for the first time since October 2020, ending a run of 31 straight rankings.

Now, the Sooners face their biggest rival, Texas, in Dallas on Saturday. Venables said the Sooners (3-2, 0-2 Big 12) need to stay focused to get out of their slump and win their fifth straight in the series with the Longhorns (3-2, 1-1).

"I know the emotion, the intensity and what this game has meant to so many people," he said. "But we shouldn't prepare for this game any different than we do any other game. And if we are, and I allow that, then I'm not doing a good job leading. We shouldn't do extra this week or be more committed this week. We should be habitual in how we get ready to play."

A loss would be the third straight for the Sooners, something that hasn't happened since 1998. But Venables has been through rough patches before. Just last year, Clemson started the season 4-3 before reeling off six straight wins.

"That team made a decision to get better and not allow themselves to be influenced by the outside noise, only be influenced by a straining to do everything you can to improve every day," he said. "One practice, one meeting at a time. ... And not allow seeds of doubt or seeds of division to come into the locker room."

There are plenty of reasons for Oklahoma's struggles, but they start with the defense. The unit started the season strong, allowing just 10 points per game in three wins. Even after the fast start, Venables warned that coaching becomes more difficult when things go well.

Colts grind out OT win over Broncos

Associated Press

DENVER — Matt Ryan kept the faith through all the sacks, interceptions, fumbles and three-and-outs that made for a streaming snooze-fest Thursday night.

“It was just kind of a slog of a game,” the Indianapolis quarterback said after Stephon Gilmore batted away Russell Wilson’s pass to Courtland Sutton in the end zone on fourth-and-1 from the 5 to give the Colts a 12-9 overtime victory over Denver.

The game featured seven field goals, a dozen punts, 25 third-down stops, four interceptions and six fumbles — none of which were recovered by the otherwise disruptive defenses.

“Our defense played lights out,” said Ryan, who emerged victorious despite getting sacked six times, giving him 21 so far this season, throwing a pair of interceptions to Caden Sterns and fumbling for the 10th time this season.

“We need to play better for sure, but I’m proud of the guys,” Ryan said. “Wins are what we need. We’re right in the mix. ... I thought the two drives at the end showed a lot of guys. You just keep battling — and it helps when your defense is shutting them down, too.”

Gilmore also intercepted Wilson’s pass

just before the 2-minute mark of the fourth quarter to set up Chase McLaughlin’s tying field goal with 5 seconds left.

“That’s the definition of a big-time player making big plays in the moment,” Colts coach Frank Reich said about Gilmore. “Isn’t it awesome you can have a game like that and still win?”

McLaughlin connected from 47 yards 4:10 into overtime to give the Colts (2-2-1) the lead in the first game in NFL history that pitted quarterbacks with at least four Pro Bowl appearances each yet featured zero touchdowns.

The Broncos (2-3) decided against a tying chip-shot field goal by Brandon McManus or even a first-down play on fourth-and-less-and-a-yard from the 5, and Wilson lined up in the shotgun next to running back Melvin Gordon, then threw incomplete over the middle.

“We wanted to win the game,” Broncos coach Nathaniel Hackett said. “We hadn’t moved the ball very well the whole night and I thought we had a spectacular drive to get all the way down there.”

Wide open and uncovered — but unseen by Wilson — was KJ Hamler, who tore off his helmet and slammed it to the ground after Wilson’s final pass was batted away, sending

the Broncos and their awful offense to their second loss in four days.

“There’s going to be a bunch of what-ifs,” Broncos guard Dalton Risner said. “You know what, if we score that touchdown, everyone thinks it’s the best call in the world.”

McLaughlin sent it to overtime with a 31-yarder after Gilmore intercepted Wilson’s pass to Tyrie Cleveland in the end zone on third-and-4 from the 13.

“Just can’t throw that,” lamented Wilson. “Got to throw it out of bounds if it’s not there.”

Wilson was sacked four times and picked off twice. His four TD throws through five games marks the worst start of his 11-year career and he hasn’t looked anything like the Broncos expected after giving him a \$245 million contract extension before his first snap for Denver.

The game pitted veteran quarterbacks struggling with their new teams. Neither team had practiced much as they worked in new running backs and key defensive replacements on a short work week, and it showed.

And as is common on Thursday nights, there was a rash of injuries with the most serious to Indy’s Kwity Payne (leg) and Denver’s Garrett Bolles (right knee), both of whom were carted off.

Wake Forest aims to avoid defensive errors vs. Army

Associated Press

Wake Forest showed it could respond after a crushing loss. The 15th-ranked Demon Deacons now have something else to prove: that they can play better defense against Army on Saturday after surviving last season’s frustrating shootout.

The Demon Deacons (4-1) won last year’s game 70-56 in a wild afternoon at Michie Stadium thanks to an offensive output that stood as the program’s best of the modern era. They’ll get another try at slowing the Black Knights (1-3) as they step out of Atlantic Coast Conference play after last weekend’s win at Florida State on the heels of a double-overtime loss to No. 5 Clemson.

“Sometimes there’s games you win and you’re relieved, and that (FSU) game was pure joy,” Wake Forest coach Dave Clawson said. “I think (it’s) one of the biggest wins we’ve had here, and so much of it was because of the circumstances.”

And yet, Clawson admitted to feeling angst when reviewing last year’s film of the

Army shootout — “one of the most torturous games I’ve ever been through.”

The Black Knights ran for 416 yards. And their 595 yards were the most allowed by the Demon Deacons all year, a jarring performance in an 11-win season that included a trip to the ACC championship game.

“We understand the only reason it was close was because of us,” Demon Deacons linebacker Ryan Smenda Jr. said. “The offense put up (70) points and a triple-option team putting up 56 points; I feel like that’s kind of unheard of. And they did it against an ACC team.”

Scoring in bunches

Wake Forest is tied for 16th in the FBS in scoring (40.4) and has amassed 202 points so far, a program record for the first five games in any season.

Bumpy start

Army has its worst start since opening at 1-4 in 2015, which ended with a 2-10 record.

Army had won nine games in each of the previous two seasons, as well as 10 wins in 2017 and 11 in 2018.

“We need a win badly,” Army coach Jeff Monken said. “A victory would really help this football team.”

Receiving threats

Wake Forest’s talent at receiver will present a challenge for Army. A.T. Perry has followed up his 15-touchdown season last year with three scores in five games. Donavon Greene has three TD grabs of his own in his return from a knee injury that sidelined him all last year. And Jahmal Banks has blossomed with five TD grabs, including a 141-yard, two-score day against Clemson.

Series history

Wake Forest is 12-5 in the series, including 6-1 at home against Army. The lone loss came in 2016, which was the Black Knights’ last trip to Winston-Salem, N.C.

Velocity soars, batting averages fall

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Higher velocity and increased shifts led to the major league batting average dropping to .243, its lowest since 1968.

Defensive shifts and 100 mph pitches set records this season, contributing to the worrisome offensive decline Major League Baseball is trying to address.

When the average dropped this low more than a half-century ago, MLB lowered the pitcher's mound. Next year's rules changes announced last month include the first restriction on shifts, a decision made over the objection of the players' association.

"We've engaged in a process to develop rules that will bring back the best form of baseball," Commissioner Rob Manfred said at the time.

The major league average

was .269 in 2006 but fell to .254 in 2016 and .245 during the pandemic-shortened 2020 season, then dropped by one point in each of the following years. The only seasons with lower averages than this year were the record low of .237 in 1968 along with 1967 and the dead-ball-era seasons of 1884, 1888 and 1908.

Defensive shifts on balls in play totaled 66,961 this season, Sports Info Solutions said Monday, up from 59,063 last year and 2,349 in 2011. The major league-best Dodgers led this year with 2,912 shifts and NL Central champion Cleveland had the fewest at 1,600.

Batting average for left-handed hitters was .236 this year, down from .254 in 2016, when lefties were one point below the big league average.

Luis Arraez's .316 average for Minnesota was the lowest

by an American League batting champion since Boston's Carl Yastrzemski hit .301 in 1968.

Velocity has a lot to do with the fall. There were 3,356 pitches of 100 mph or more, 0.05% of the major league total of 703,918, according to MLB Statcast. That was up from 1,829 in 2021 and 1,056 in 2019.

Minnesota's Jhoan Duran had the most 100 mph pitches with 392, followed by Cincinnati's Hunter Greene (337), St. Louis' Jordan Hicks (274) and Ryan Helsey (237) and Seattle's Andrés Muñoz (209).

Duran averaged 100.8 mph with his fastball, Muñoz 100.2 and Hicks 100.1.

"Every time that bullpen door swings open, it's velocity," Atlanta manager Brian Snitker said. "The guys, they weren't like that. The closers weren't throwing like they are now. But it's kind of the way they are

growing up and how they are trained — and amazing to me, the number of them, too. It's like they just keep coming."

The average four-seam fastball velocity was 93.9 mph, up from 93.7 mph in 2021 and 93.1 mph in 2015, when Statcast first began measuring.

"The way the game is now, everybody's throwing that hard. It's not fun to face, but it's just how the game is," Seattle's Ty France said.

Home runs dropped to 5,215 from 5,944 last year and a record 6,776 in 2019.

The gap between strikeouts and hits narrowed to 1,135 from a record 2,661 last year. Strikeouts topped hits for the first time in 2019. After increasing annually from 2005 through 2019, when there were a record 42,823 whiffs, strikeouts dropped to 42,145 in 2021 and 40,812 this year.

Players want more from NHL against racism

Associated Press

For too long, Matt Dumba felt he was on his own dealing with racial taunts directed at him as a youngster growing up in Saskatchewan.

It was no different for Dumba as an adult, one of just a handful of minority players in the National Hockey League. Even in a circle of his fellow players, the Minnesota defenseman was alone in dropping to one knee on a global stage to silently protest systemic racism.

Some two years since that iconic moment as the league resumed the pandemic-delayed playoffs in Edmonton, Alberta, Dumba has gained some perspective to know he has, in fact, not been alone.

"I'm the first one to say our generation, everything with the phones, social media, it's not an easy world to live in," Dumba told The Associated Press during a recent interview before shifting his gaze to the past.

"But back then, segregation and just how people of color were treated, it really gives you a different perspective on things, and just how much they did for us to even be in a position where we can make our impact felt

in the present," he added. "It's all of us as a collective, everyone pulling on this rope to better the game."

Dumba is referring to not only his peers, including members of the Hockey Diversity Alliance he helped establish in the wake of George Floyd's death at the hands of Minneapolis police in 2020. The 28-year-old player with a Filipino mother and white father is also referring to those who endured many of the same taunts and confronted intolerance since hockey's earliest days.

He came to this realization while taking part in the filming of the 90-minute documentary titled "Black Ice," which is set to be released Friday.

The movie ties the past to the present by first highlighting the inroads made and struggles encountered by members of the Nova Scotia-based Coloured Hockey League. Established in the late 1800s and lasting until the 1930s, the league is credited for introducing the slap shot and allowing goalies to leave their feet to make saves but was nearly forgotten until being featured in a book of the same name that was published in 2004.

As for the present, the film documents first-hand experiences in revealing just how marred by hate hockey remains in affecting current players, from the NHL to 16-year-old goalie Mark Connors, the son of mixed-raced parents who faced racial slurs while competing in a tournament in Prince Edward Island in February.

For Dumba, the reality he and others have faced hit home when watching the late Herb Carnegie break down in tears during a television interview in response to Toronto Maple Leafs founder Conn Smythe reportedly saying he'd pay anyone \$10,000 if they could turn Carnegie white in order to sign him.

"It's not right," Dumba said of Smythe, whose name is on the trophy awarded to each season's playoff MVP. "People are seeing that. And people are also recognizing now that, really, in a different way, it's still happening, which is the saddest part of all."

The NHL is a sport wrangling with issues of diversity and inclusion, with Dumba among those saying the league has been slow to adapt and grow.