

Biden in Israel as Middle East reels

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — President Joe Biden said Wednesday that Israel had agreed to allow humanitarian assistance to begin flowing into Gaza from Egypt, with the understanding that shipments would be subject to inspections and that aid should go to civilians and not Hamas militants.

“I understand. Many Americans understand,” Biden said, likening the Oct. 7 attack on Israel by Hamas to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the U.S. that killed nearly 3,000 people. “You can’t look at what has happened here ... and not scream out for justice. While you feel that rage, don’t be consumed by it.”

Israel had cut off the flow of food, fuel and water to the Gaza Strip after the attack by Hamas, in which nearly 1,400 people in Israel were killed. Mediators have been struggling to break a deadlock over providing sup-

plies to desperate civilians, aid groups and hospitals. An explosion at a Gaza Strip hospital compounded the suffering.

Israel confirmed that food, water and medicine would begin to flow to Gaza through Egypt, though exactly when that would begin wasn’t immediately clear.

There were conflicting claims of who was responsible for the hospital blast. Officials in Gaza quickly blamed an Israeli airstrike. Israel denied it was involved and released a flurry of video, audio and other information that it said showed the blast was instead due to a missile misfire by Islamic Jihad, another militant group operating in Gaza. The Islamic Jihad dismissed that claim. The Associated Press has not independently verified any of the claims or evidence released by the parties.

Biden on Wednesday said data from his Defense Department

showed it was not likely a strike by the Israeli military. And a National Security Council spokesperson later posted on social media that an analysis of “overhead imagery, intercepts and open source information” showed that Israel was not behind the attack. But the U.S. continued to collect evidence.

“Based on what I’ve seen, it appears as though it was done by the other team, not you,” Biden told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a meeting. But he said there were “a lot of people out there” who weren’t sure what caused the blast, which sparked protests throughout the Middle East.

Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said Israel’s forces were not firing in the area when the blast occurred. And, he said, Israeli radar confirmed a rocket barrage was fired by the Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad from a

nearby cemetery at the time of the blast, around 6:59 p.m. Independent video showed one of the rockets in the barrage falling out of the sky, he said.

The misfired rocket hit the parking lot outside the hospital. Were it an airstrike, there would have been a crater there; instead, the fiery blast came from the misfired rocket’s warhead and its unspent propellant, he said.

Hagari said Israeli’s intelligence would be shared with U.S. and British officials.

Biden said he had spoken with the Israeli cabinet “to agree to the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance of civilians in Gaza, based on the understanding that there will be inspections and the aid will go to civilians and not to Hamas.”

Biden also announced an additional \$100 million in humanitarian aid for Gaza and the West Bank.

Navy carriers bring military might to Mediterranean

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy—Two U.S. Navy carrier groups being positioned in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea possess intelligence-gathering and patrol capabilities that could boost Israel in its battle against Hamas, naval analysts said.

The USS Dwight D. Eisenhower carrier strike group is joining the USS Gerald R. Ford carrier group primarily to send a deterrence message to Iran and any other groups thinking of turning the war in the Gaza Strip into a regional conflict.

Ford has a dual-band radar that creates a 360-degree view of

activity around the carrier, including the airspace above it. That system could help Israel watch for potential long-range ballistic missile threats, said Bryan Clark, director of the Hudson Institute’s Center for Defense Concepts and Technology.

Meanwhile, Navy aircraft could be used to patrol Israel’s perimeter.

“That frees up Israeli aircraft to focus on waging the fight,” Clark said.

Ford’s accompanying ships and its air wing, including E-2D Advanced Hawkeyes and E/A-18G Growlers, complement Israeli intelligence capabilities. The ship’s quick launch and re-

covery system for aircraft also could come in handy should Israel need a rapid air response, he said.

But if the conflict remains limited to Hamas and small-scale skirmishes with Hezbollah at the northern border with Lebanon, it’s unclear whether much help will be needed by Israel, which already has advanced intelligence-gathering abilities.

There is no airstrike threat facing the Israel Defense Forces and the Israeli navy will be comprehensively guarding against possible small-boat attacks, said Jan van Tol, a retired Navy captain and senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary

Assessments in Washington.

There also is no need for U.S. patrols to assist Israel’s air force aircraft, van Tol said, adding that it’s more important to minimize friendly-fire issues.

An extension of the Ford carrier strike group’s deployment was announced Tuesday. The strike group already was on duty in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of responsibility, which includes the Mediterranean, and was nearing the end of a six-month deployment.

Also on Tuesday, the Pentagon told about 2,000 personnel and a range of units to be ready for deployment related to the situation in the Middle East.

Study: 68% of troops are obese, overweight

By **DOUG G. WARE**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Almost seven out of every 10 U.S. troops are either overweight or obese, according to a new report, which also warns the growing trend could compromise military readiness and undermine national security.

The American Security Project, a Washington-based nonprofit organization that studies modern national security issues, conducted the study and found 68% of active-duty service members fall somewhere between overweight and obese on the body mass index, which is a long-used but controversial method of assessing a person's body classification by height and weight. A person between 25 and 30 on the BMI is considered clinically overweight and more than 30 is considered obese, according to the National Institutes of Health.

“Rapid and sustained recurrence of obesity across all services, ranks and positions now poses a dire threat, especially for at-risk populations and those in critical combat roles,” the group's report states. “Designing an effective strategy to monitor and tackle obesity within the U.S. military begins by treating it like any other chronic disease.”

The American Security Project underscored obesity is the leading disqualifier of military applicants and a “primary contributor to in-service injuries and medical discharges.” The group also said the number of troops in the “obese” category have more than doubled in the past decade — from 10.4% in 2012 to 21.6% last year.

Each service has its own minimum body composition standards that recruits must meet, but the maximum has fallen between BMI scores of 24.9 to 27.5.

The American Security Project said it studied sets of data supplied by the Pentagon between 2018 and 2021 for active-duty members in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps and interviewed dozens of service members who were part of the active-duty component in the past six years. Military Health System reports spanning from 1973 to 2023 were also analyzed. The group also studied data from several military physicians and demographic data obtained from the Defense Medical Surveillance System. Additional data on overweight and obese troops came from the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Division and was based on evaluations of nearly 545,000 active-duty service members who completed a health assessment in 2021.

The project's report is the latest data-driven assessment to show more American troops are gaining weight. The scientific journal BMC Public Health found in August that about 140,000 active-duty Army soldiers had gained weight in a nine-month span in 2020 and 2021 during the coronavirus pandemic, when service members had to spend more time indoors. Nearly 74% of all soldiers who were studied had an unhealthy BMI in that time — up from about 68% in the weeks before the pandemic arrived in the United States, BMC Public Health found.

“Based on the results from this study ... increases in BMI among Army soldiers are likely to continue unless there is intervention,” the report, which used data from the Military Health System Data Repository, said at the time.

The report published by the American Security Project agreed and outlined several recommendations for the Pentagon, including scrapping Defense Department policies that allow commanders to exempt obese troops from medical intervention and reviewing body composition regulations. It also suggested referring obese troops to appropriate physicians for treatment and producing more frequent obesity reports.

Pentagon images show risky moves by Chinese pilots

By **DOUG G. WARE**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — There has been a sharp increase in risky behavior by Chinese pilots in the South China Sea in the past two years, U.S. defense officials said Tuesday, releasing newly declassified images and video to support their claim.

“Since the fall of 2021, we have seen more than 180 such incidents — more in the past two years than in the decade before that,” said Ely Ratner, the Pentagon's assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific security affairs. “That's nearly 200 cases where [Chinese] operators have performed reckless maneuvers, or discharged [anti-radar measures], or shot

off flares, or approached too rapidly or too close to U.S. aircraft.”

Ratner said the number of risky midair incidents rises to at least 300 since 2021 when accounting for Chinese actions against U.S. and ally planes in the South and East China Sea.

“All [this is to try] to interfere in the ability of U.S. forces to operate safely in places where we and every country in the world have every right to be under international law,” he said.

Ratner and Adm. John Aquilino, the commander of Indo-Pacific Command, expressed alarm at the abrupt rise in “risky and coercive” maneuvers and said they will be outlined in more detail in the Pen-

tagon's forthcoming Chinese Military Power Report — the Defense Department's annual assessment of Beijing's military strength.

“This year's report will be out soon and taken together with today's announcements, it represents the department's most comprehensive depiction to date of this highly concerning behavior by the [Chinese military],” Ratner said. “[China's] coercive and risky behavior ... seeks to intimidate and coerce members of the international community into giving up their rights.”

Chinese military aggression against U.S. and allied aircraft in the region is nothing new.

The Pentagon has noted mul-

iple incidents this year, including one in May when a Chinese fighter jet made an “unnecessarily aggressive maneuver” in flying too close to a U.S. reconnaissance plane over the South China Sea.

Ratner and Aquilino said the images released Tuesday showing the risky behavior by Chinese planes were only just declassified. They said the increasingly unsafe behavior by China could lead to “inadvertent conflict.”

“I am most concerned about the potential for accidents, and those accidents could lead to miscalculation,” said Aquilino, PACOM's commander since May 2021. “We must prevent these from happening.”

Poll: 2 in 3 in US say Afghan War not worth it

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — At a time when Americans are deeply divided along party lines, a new poll shows considerable agreement on at least one issue: The United States' two-decade-long war in Afghanistan was not worth fighting.

The poll from the Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research comes two years after the U.S. pulled out of Afghanistan in August 2021 and the Taliban returned to power. The war was started to go after the masterminds of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the Taliban who allowed them to use Afghan territory. It ended in frantic scenes of Afghans and Americans desperately trying to get on one of the last flights out of Kabul.

Polls suggest the withdrawal, seen by many as chaotic and ill-planned, may have been a turning

point for President Joe Biden's approval ratings, which started a downward slide around that time and have not recovered since.

Two-thirds of Americans say the war in Afghanistan was not worth fighting; 65% of Democrats and 63% of Republicans agree on that evaluation. Many have doubts about how successful the U.S. was at accomplishing more specific goals such as eliminating the threat from extremists.

"It was unwinnable from the beginning," said Martin Stefen, 78, a Republican who lives in Carson City, Nev. He said the U.S. should have paid closer attention to what happened to the Soviet Union, which waged a decade-long war in Afghanistan during the 1980s only to pull out in defeat in 1989. And, he said, the U.S. should have had a more specific end goal for how it wanted the war in Afghanistan to go and a better understanding of the country's tribal politics.

That thought was echoed by

Justin Campbell, 28, a Democrat from Brookhaven, Miss. He said it was clear after the U.S. was entrenched in Afghanistan that it didn't have very deep support. Campbell said he's not pleased the Taliban are back in control.

"But I don't think it was worth us staying over there," he said.

Maliha Chishti, a lecturer and research associate at the Pearson Institute, said she was struck by the fact that after 20 years of war, so many American and Afghan lives lost and billions spent, the vast majority said they felt Afghanistan was not friendly to the U.S. or was an outright enemy. She said the responses demonstrate a frustration on the part of Americans and the need to ask questions about what went wrong with America's attempts to intervene in Afghanistan.

"We invested all of this money to really build a state from scratch and when we left, that state completely collapsed," she said.

Many Americans also say the

United States was not successful with many of its key objectives in Afghanistan. Eliminating the threat from Islamic extremists in Afghanistan during the war is still seen as an important goal by many across party lines: 46% of Democrats and 44% of Republicans called that highly important. But only about one-quarter in each group said this successfully happened during the war.

Slightly fewer than half — 46% — say the U.S. and its allies were successful at the goal of apprehending or killing the individuals in Afghanistan who were responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks, compared with 25% who think the U.S. was unsuccessful in achieving that goal.

The poll of 1,191 adults was conducted Sept. 21-25, using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, designed to represent the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.8 percentage points.

Female Dems say abortion access key to NDAA votes

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Members of the House Democratic Women's Caucus warned defense committee leaders Tuesday that including provisions that limit abortion access in the fiscal 2024 defense authorization bill would make it impossible for them to support the bill's final passage.

The warning, in the form of a letter to the chairmen and ranking members of the House and Senate Armed Services committees, adds an additional layer of uncertainty to an already fraught path forward for the annual National Defense Authorization Act, which the House passed in July by a vote of 219-210.

All but four Democrats voted "no" after Republicans amended the bill to rescind a Pentagon policy that reimburses travel for ser-

vice members who cannot access reproductive health care in states where they are stationed. The same policy led to Alabama Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville's ongoing hold of more than 300 military promotions.

In their letter, House Democratic Women's Caucus leaders Lois Frankel of Florida, Teresa Leger Fernandez of New Mexico and Nikema Williams of Georgia expressed their strong opposition to any provisions that "attack access to reproductive health care and fertility treatments."

The abortion language faces a tough road ahead in the Democrat-led Senate, which did not include it in its version of the fiscal 2024 NDAA, and at the White House, where President Joe Biden is highly unlikely to sign a bill that restricts abortion.

Russia discloses bomber mission over Sea of Japan

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Russian bombers and fighters flew a seven-hour mission over the Sea of Japan, Russia's defense ministry announced the same day President Vladimir Putin arrived in Beijing for talks with Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

An undated video released by the ministry Tuesday shows a pair of Tupolev-95 bombers escorted by Sukhoi-35 fighter jets over waters between Japan and South Korea.

The mission took place the same day an Air Force B-52H Stratofortress bomber touched down on the Korean Peninsula for the first time in at least 30 years.

The visit to Cheongju International Airport reinforces the United States' "ironclad commit-

ment" to defend the South from a North Korean attack, according to a U.S. Forces Korea news release Monday.

Russian aircraft regularly fly over neutral waters of the Pacific, Arctic, North Atlantic, Black and Baltic Seas, according to the country's defense ministry.

It's unclear whether Japan scrambled fighters in response to the Russian planes. A spokesman for Japan's Ministry of Defense, reached by phone Wednesday, said he could not provide information until Friday.

Japan Air Self-Defense Force jets scrambled 424 times between April and September to intercept foreign aircraft, Japan's Joint Staff announced Sept. 30. Of those, 304 were against Chinese aircraft and 110 were against Russian aircraft.

Jordan fails again to become House speaker

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republican Rep. Jim Jordan failed again Wednesday on the second ballot to become House speaker, the hard-fighting ally of Donald Trump losing even more GOP colleagues who refused to give him the gavel.

Next steps were highly uncertain as a bipartisan group of lawmakers floated an extraordinary plan — to give the interim speaker-pro-tempore, Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., more power to reopen the House and temporarily conduct routine business.

What was clear was that Jordan's path to become House speaker was almost certainly lost. He was opposed by two more than the 20 Republican detractors he lost in first round voting the day before.

The House gaveled in with angry, frustrated GOP lawmakers looking at other options. And as the roll call was underway, a few new detractors emerged to oppose Jordan, who did not seem to be picking up new votes beyond one lawmaker who was

absent the day before.

Ahead of the morning vote, Jordan made an unexpected plea for party unity, the combative Judiciary Committee chairman telling his colleagues on social media, "We must stop attacking each other and come together."

A surprisingly large and politically diverse group of 20 Republicans had rejected Jordan's nomination the day before, many resenting the hardball tactics seeking to enforce support, and viewing the Ohio congressman as too extreme for the powerful position of House speaker, second in line to the presidency.

The House has hit a standstill, stuck while Jordan worked to shore up backing from Republican colleagues for the job to replace the ousted Kevin McCarthy.

Republicans are exhausted by the infighting since McCarthy's sudden removal by hardliners, who are now within reach of a central seat of U.S. power.

The vote for House speaker,

once a formality in Congress, has devolved into another bitter showdown for the gavel.

With Republicans in majority control 221-212, Jordan needed to pick up most of his GOP foes to win. Tuesday's tally, with 200 Republicans voting for Jordan and 212 for the Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York, left no candidate with a clear majority, as the 20 Republicans voted for someone else.

In nominating Jordan, veteran Republican Rep. Tom Cole of Oklahoma said it was time to end the upheaval that he had warned against with McCarthy's sudden ouster.

"We have a chance today to end that chaos, end that uncertainty," Cole said.

He said that Jordan was "not a shrinking violet" but someone who could lead the House.

Democratic Rep. Pete Aguilar noted that Jeffries continues to win more votes and is the best choice to move the country forward.

"The country cannot afford more delays and more chaos," Aguilar said.

Amazon tests 1-hour meds drops via drone

Associated Press

Amazon will soon make prescription drugs fall from the sky when the e-commerce giant becomes the latest company to test drone deliveries for medications.

The company said Wednesday that customers in College Station, Texas, can now get prescriptions delivered by a drone within an hour of placing their order. The drone, programmed to fly from a delivery center with a secure pharmacy, will travel to the customer's address, descend to a height of about 13 feet, and drop a padded package.

Amazon says customers will be able to choose from more than 500 medications, a list that includes common treatments for conditions like the flu or pneumonia, but not controlled substances.

The company's Prime Air division began testing drone deliveries of common household items last December in College Station and Lockeford, Calif. Amazon spokesperson Jessica Bardoulas said the company has made thousands of deliveries since launching the service, and is expanding it to include prescriptions based in part on customer requests.

Amazon Prime already delivers some medications from the company's pharmacy inside of two days. But pharmacy Vice President John Love said that doesn't help someone with an acute illness like the flu.

Amazon Pharmacy Chief Medical Officer Dr. Vin Gupta says the U.S. health care system generally struggles with diagnosing and treating patients quickly for acute illnesses, something that was apparent throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Suspect admits to Holloway's murder

Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — The chief suspect in Natalee Holloway's 2005 disappearance in Aruba admitted he killed her and disposed of her remains, and has agreed to plead guilty to charges he tried to extort money from the teen's mother years later, a U.S. judge said Wednesday. The disclosure came during a plea and sentencing hearing for Joran van der Sloot, 36, in a federal courtroom in Alabama — just a few miles from the Birmingham suburb

where Holloway used to live.

"You changed the course of our lives and you turned them upside down," her mother Beth Holloway said in court. "You are a killer."

Van der Sloot is not charged in Holloway's death. The Dutch citizen was sentenced Wednesday to 20 years in prison for extortion and wire fraud, but as part of his plea agreement, that sentence will run concurrently with his sentence in Peru, where he's serving a 28-year prison sentence for killing Ste-

phany Flores in 2010.

U.S. Judge Anna Manasco said she considered van der Sloot's confession to Holloway's murder and the destruction of her remains as part of the sentencing decision.

Holloway went missing during a high school graduation trip with classmates. She was last seen leaving a bar with van der Sloot. He was questioned in the disappearance but was never prosecuted. A judge declared Holloway dead, but her body has never been found.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

NYC limiting migrant families' shelter stays

NY ALBANY — New York City Mayor Eric Adams announced Monday that he is limiting shelter stays for migrant families with children to 60 days, bidding to ease pressure on a city housing system overwhelmed by a large influx of asylum seekers over the past year.

The Democrat's office said it will begin sending 60-day notices to migrant families who live in shelters, though they could reapply for housing if they are unable to find a new place to live. The city also will provide "intensified casework services" to help families secure housing, according to a news release.

It's the mayor's latest attempt to provide relief to the city's shelter system and finances as it grapples with more than 120,000 international migrants who have come to New York, many without housing or the legal ability to work. More than 60,000 migrants currently live in city shelters, according to his office. Adams has estimated the city will spend \$12 billion over the next three years to handle the influx, setting up large-scale emergency shelters, renting out hotels and providing various government services for migrants.

Sports bets near-record levels in New Jersey

NJ ATLANTIC CITY — Sports betting and internet gambling were at near-record levels in New Jersey in September, and nearly half of the Atlantic City casinos won

more money from in-person gamblers than they did in September 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

But the encouraging numbers released Monday by the state Division of Gaming Enforcement did not change a fundamental concern of this seaside gambling resort: that its core business — money won from people on the casino floor — is still not back to pre-pandemic levels at five of the nine casinos. The amount of money collectively won from on-premises gamblers was higher this September (\$246 million) than it was in September 2019 (\$224 million.)

Governor: Agencies must switch to electric vehicles

NM SANTA FE — New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed an executive order Monday directing state agencies to switch to an all-electric vehicle fleet within the next 12 years.

Lujan Grisham also said she intends to pursue tax credits for electric vehicles during the upcoming legislative session.

The Democratic governor made the announcement Monday during her Symposium on the Future of Transportation in New Mexico.

The proposed tax credits would apply to new and used electric vehicles to help meet climate goals.

Brothers plead guilty in converter theft scheme

CA SACRAMENTO — Three members of a California family pleaded guilty Monday to conspiracy for their role in a ring that shipped \$600 million worth of stolen catalytic

converters from California to New Jersey, federal prosecutors said.

Brothers Tou Sue Vang, 32, and Andrew Vang, 28, along with their mother, Monica Moua, 58, were part of "a national network of thieves, dealers, and processors" who provided the stolen auto anti-smog devices to a metal refinery for more than \$600 million dollars, according to a statement from the U.S. attorney's office.

Twenty-one people from California and New Jersey have been charged in the case, prosecutors said. The three Sacramento family members pleaded guilty to conspiring to transport the devices in return for more than \$38 million.

Court upholds Google keyword search warrant

CO DENVER — Colorado's highest court on Monday upheld the search of Google users' keyword history to identify suspects in a 2020 fatal arson fire, an approach that critics have called a digital dragnet that threatens to undermine people's privacy and their constitutional protections against unreasonable searches and seizures.

However the Colorado Supreme Court cautioned it was not making a "broad proclamation" on the constitutionality of such warrants and emphasized it was ruling on the facts of just this one case.

At issue before the court was a search warrant from Denver police requiring Google to provide the IP addresses of anyone who had searched over 15 days for the address of the home that was set on fire, killing five immigrants from the West African

nation of Senegal.

After some back and forth over how Google would be able to provide information without violating its privacy policy, Google produced a spreadsheet of sixty-one searches made by eight accounts. Google provided the IP addresses for those accounts, but no names. Five of the IP addresses were based in Colorado and police obtained the names of those people through another search warrant. After investigating those people, police eventually identified three teens as suspects.

Pepper X sets Guinness Book heat record

SC FORT MILL — Ed Currie, the South Carolina hot pepper expert who crossbred and grew the Carolina Reaper that's hotter than most pepper sprays police use to subdue unruly criminals, has broken his own world record with a pepper that's three times hotter.

Pepper X was publicly named the hottest pepper in the world on Oct. 9 by the Guinness Book of World Records, beating out the Reaper in Currie's decade-long hunt to perfect a pepper that he says provides "immediate, brutal heat."

Currie said when he first tried Pepper X, it did more than warm his heart.

"I was feeling the heat for three-and-a-half hours. Then the cramps came," said Currie, one of only five people so far to eat a entire Pepper X. "Those cramps are horrible. I was laid out flat on a marble wall for approximately an hour in the rain, groaning in pain."

— From wire reports

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MLB rookies unfazed by postseason

Associated Press

Johan Rojas dashed toward the warning track in a crucial October moment, sized up the hard-hit ball that was hurtling toward the fence and made a leaping catch before crashing into the wall as the crowd at Citizens Bank Park roared in approval.

Not bad for a guy who's been in the big leagues for about three months.

The Philadelphia Phillies' defensive wizard is among a handful of rookies who have made a huge impact in baseball's postseason, joining Arizona Diamondbacks outfielder Corbin Carroll and Texas Rangers standouts Evan Carter and Josh Jung. The youthful playoff infusion is the continuation of one of the best regular seasons for rookie hitters in MLB history.

There have been 18 rookies with at least one at-bat this postseason through Monday, and that group was hitting a combined .247 with an .819 OPS. Five rookies — Carter, Carroll, Baltimore's Gunnar Henderson and Minnesota's Royce Lewis and Edouard Julien — had OPS to-

tals over 1.000, and Jung wasn't far behind at .947. The postseason average for all players was .710.

And it's just the latest example of first-year players taking October by storm. Two of the last three ALCS MVPs — Randy Arozarena in 2020 and Jeremy Peña in 2022 — were rookies. Peña also won the World Series MVP.

The 23-year-old Rojas is known more for his glove than his bat, and his catch of a Ronald Acuña Jr. smash preserved a 3-1 lead for the Phillies in Game 4 of the NL Division Series on Oct. 12, helping them beat the Braves and advance to the NLCS.

"This kid is so poised," Phillies manager Rob Thomson said. "He's so good of an athlete, electric in the outfield. I felt like he was going to catch it."

"So he's been a huge addition to our ball club. He really has, even if he doesn't do anything at the plate. And he's had decent at-bats. But if he does nothing at the plate, just his defense helps the club."

Arizona's Carroll, who is also 23, is among the leading candi-

dates for NL Rookie of the Year after swatting 25 homers and stealing 54 bases. The All-Star hasn't been fazed by his first appearance in the postseason, batting .333 with two homers, two stolen bases and six walks through seven games.

He helped the surprising D-backs sweep the 100-win Los Angeles Dodgers in the NL Division Series and advance to the NLCS, which is the deepest the franchise has played into the postseason since 2007.

"I'd say adrenaline-wise, it's probably felt about the same as the regular season, maybe a tiny bit more," Carroll said. "For whatever reason I wouldn't say I've gotten too amped up."

They'll almost certainly need some more Carroll heroics if they're going to advance to the World Series. The Phillies have a 2-0 lead over the D-backs in the NLCS after a 10-0 win Tuesday night.

Then there's Jung and Carter, who have helped make the Rangers' lineup among the deepest in baseball. The 25-year-old Jung was among the leading candidates for AL Rookie of the

Year before a fractured left thumb in early August caused him to miss several weeks.

It's probably no coincidence that the Rangers started to struggle around the time he got hurt — the third baseman hit 23 homers during the regular season. Texas had a 73-49 record in games he played during the regular season and just a 17-23 mark when he didn't.

The 21-year-old Carter has given the Rangers a massive boost since making his big league debut on Sept. 8. He hit .306 with five homers in the final weeks of the regular season and has continued pounding baseballs in the postseason, with a .350 average and .536 on-base percentage.

"You have to be impressed with these two young kids, how they're carrying themselves, handling the intense games that we're playing in," Rangers manager Bruce Bochy said. "You wouldn't know it with these two. I love their focus. They're not afraid of anything."

"These guys want to be out there. They want to be in the fire. You can see it."

Schwarber, Phillies wallop Arizona in NLCS Game 2

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Kyle Schwarber is pounding postseason homers at such a rate that he fits right in with Mickey Mantle and Reggie Jackson.

The tattooed slugger is doing it all while powering the Philadelphia Phillies toward a chance for the franchise's first World Series championship since 2008.

"If you want to get paid, win baseball games," he said. "That goes a long way."

So do his Schwarbombs — especially in October.

Schwarber hit two of Philadelphia's three solo homers off Merrill Kelly, and the sweet-

swinging Phillies pounded the Arizona Diamondbacks 10-0 on Tuesday night for a 2-0 lead in the NL Championship Series.

Trea Turner also connected and J.T. Realmuto had two hits and three RBIs as Philadelphia improved to 7-1 in the playoffs, moving closer to a second straight World Series appearance. Aaron Nola tossed three-hit ball and struck out seven in six innings.

Game 3 is Thursday at Chase Field. The Texas Rangers also held a 2-0 lead over the Houston Astros in the ALCS going into Wednesday's game.

"I think this is kind of the line-up that we envisioned our-

selves having all season long," Realmuto said. "I just think that we're clicking at the right time right now."

It was another noisy night in Philly as Kelly was roasted after saying fans at Citizens Bank Park could not possibly be any louder than the ones he heard cheering for Team USA in the World Baseball Classic.

Not just any Classic game. The one in May when Turner hit a grand slam for the United States that lifted the Americans into the tournament's semifinals.

"I haven't obviously heard this place on the field," Kelly said ahead of Game 1, "but I would be very surprised if it

trumped that (WBC) game down in Miami."

As the kids say, challenge accepted.

Boisterous fans are great. So is the long ball. Schwarber's homers in the third and sixth were Philadelphia's 14th and 15th homers in the last four games as the Phillies continue to mash their way through October.

The Phillies flashed their leather to keep Arizona in check. Bryce Harper made a diving stab at first to get Carroll in the third. Alec Bohm made a diving snag at third and one-hopped the throw to get Gabriel Moreno in the second.

LSU No. 1 in women's preseason Top 25

Associated Press

Defending champion LSU is ranked No. 1 in the women's preseason AP Top 25 college basketball poll for the first time in school history.

LSU, which won its first NCAA title last April behind star player Angel Reese and Co., received 35 first-place votes from a 36-member national media panel in the poll released Tuesday. UConn received the other top vote. The second-ranked Huskies have now been ranked in the AP poll for 565 consecutive weeks, tying Tennessee's record.

Caitlin Clark and national runner-up Iowa were third. UCLA and Utah round out the top five.

The Tigers were ranked second in 1977 and third twice in 2004 and 2005 in the preseason poll, but never No. 1 until this year. There is a lot of optimism around LSU as it returns a stellar group, including Reese, along with two talented transfers in Hailey Van Lith and Aneesah Morrow.

"We appreciate the recognition of being the No. 1 ranked team going into the season and it

is something we will embrace," LSU coach Kim Mulkey said. "A ranking doesn't win championships, but it brings great awareness to our program and our school. We want to be ranked No. 1 at the end of the season."

The Tigers were last ranked No. 1 during a five-week stretch in 2005.

UConn's run started in the preseason poll of the 1993-94 season and has gone for 30 straight years. No. 14 Maryland has the second-longest active streak, appearing in the poll for 250 consecutive weeks.

UCLA and Utah are spending their final year in the Pac-12. The Bruins haven't been in the top five in the preseason since 1999 when they were fifth. The Utes, who haven't been in the preseason poll since 2005, bring back a team led by Pac-12 player of the year Alissa Pili.

South Carolina was sixth, ending a run of 38 straight weeks that the Gamecocks were No. 1 in the poll. That's the second-longest run behind UConn's 51-week streak (2008-10). Dawn Staley's team has been in the preseason top 10 every year since 2014, trailing only

UConn's 30-season run that began in 1994.

Ohio State, Virginia Tech, Indiana and Notre Dame round out the top 10. It's the first time the Hokies, who reached the Final Four last season, are in the preseason top 10.

Star power

There are a lot of talented players in the rankings alongside Clark, the AP player of the year, Reese and Paige Bueckers of UConn. Texas guard Rori Harmon is lightning quick and Tennessee's Rickea Jackson is a great scorer. Notre Dame guard Olivia Miles is returning from an ACL injury she suffered in March.

Welcome back

No. 12 Ole Miss is in the preseason poll for the first time since 1995. It's the school's best ranking since the Rebels were ninth on Dec. 8, 1992. No. 23 Illinois is making its first appearance in the preseason rankings since 1999. No. 21 USC is back in the preseason poll for the first time since 2011 and Colorado is getting early recognition for the first time since 2013.

Unfamiliar spot

Stanford is ranked 15th in the preseason poll, the school's lowest mark since 2015 when the Cardinal were 16th. Tara VanDerveer's squad had been in the top 10 in the six previous initial polls.

Conference supremacy

The Pac-12 has the most ranked teams (six). No. 24 Washington State joins UCLA, Utah, Stanford, Colorado and USC. It's the first time the Cougars have been ranked in the preseason poll.

The Southeastern Conference, Big Ten and Atlantic Coast Conference each have five schools ranked. The Big East and Big 12 each have two teams in the poll.

Mark your calendar

The season begins for most teams on Nov. 6 with some huge matchups in the first couple of weeks, including LSU playing Colorado and Ohio State facing USC on opening night in Las Vegas. Notre Dame and South Carolina also play each other that day in Paris.

NCAA president shifts focus to athlete employment status

Associated Press

NCAA President Charlie Baker told federal lawmakers Tuesday that for college sports to modernize, the athletes must remain students.

At a Senate hearing to discuss how athletes are compensated for their celebrity endorsements, Baker and other college sports leaders shifted the focus toward the looming possibility of athletes being deemed employees of their schools — a development that would upend amateur athletics in multiple ways.

"To enable enhanced benefits while protecting programs from one-size-fits-all actions in the

courts, we support codifying current regulatory guidance into law by granting student-athletes special status that would affirm they are not employees," Baker said in his opening remarks.

Baker said athlete representatives from all three NCAA divisions have stated they do not want to be employees of their schools. He also warned that without congressional action, Division II and III schools might abandon their athletic programs.

Notre Dame athletic director Jack Swarbrick said inaction by Congress would lead to a series of rulings that declare college

athletes employees — think labor pacts, revenue sharing and benefits all potentially in the mix — but without uniformity.

"We'll have a patchwork of state legislation that will also create differences which are unsustainable," he said. "That for me are the things that are most important to avoid."

Also appearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee were Big Ten Commissioner Tony Petitti; former Florida gymnast Trinity Thomas; Walker Jones, who runs the booster-funded collective that supports University of Mississippi athletes; St. Joseph's athletic director Jill Bodensteiner; and Ra-

mogi Huma, a former UCLA football player and longtime advocate for college athletes.

It was the 10th hearing on college sports on Capitol Hill since 2020, but the first since Baker took over as NCAA president earlier this year.

The former governor of Massachusetts touted recent reforms by the NCAA, including more long-term health insurance for athletes, degree completion funds for up to 10 years and scholarship protections.

He also told the committee the NCAA was moving forward with its own regulations for name, image and likeness compensation deals for athletes.

Flyers win home opener over Canucks

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Sean Couturier scored on a penalty shot for his first goal in nearly two years, Carter Hart made 25 saves and the Philadelphia Flyers beat the Vancouver Canucks 2-0 in their home opener Tuesday night.

After being taken down by Elias Pettersson, Couturier beat Thatcher Demko on the penalty shot to make it 2-0 with 2:37 remaining in the first period. Couturier approached the goal from the right with his back to Demko, then spun to his forehand for a snapper that went in off the far post.

“I mean, in the last two years, I’ve had too much time to think about and work on it,” Couturier said. “So, just glad it worked.”

Couturier scored for the first time since Dec. 10, 2021. He was sidelined for the second half of the 2021-22 season and all of last season because of a back injury.

“Obviously I dream about scoring goals in the NHL, but coming into the game, I just focus on doing the little details right, play the right way and lead by example, and chances will come, points will come,” Couturier said. “Just got to stick to it.”

Couturier’s presence has been welcome for second-year coach John Tortorella.

“I think he just brings that calming presence to our team,” Tortorella said. “I think it’s going to take time to get his complete game back, but more and more you can see it coming.”

Oilers 6, Predators 1: Leon Draisaitl had two power-play goals and two assists, and visiting Edmonton beat Nashville for its first victory of the season.

Zach Hyman had a goal and three assists for Edmonton, which opened with two losses to Vancouver by a combined 12-4 score. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins had a goal and two assists, Connor McDavid and Warren Foegele also scored, and Jack Campbell made 41 saves.

Tommy Novak scored a power-play goal in the second period for Nashville. The Predators dropped to 1-3 on the season.

Wild 5, Canadiens 2: Joel Eriksson Ek had two power-play goals and added an assist to help visiting Minnesota beat Montreal.

Kirill Kaprizov added a goal and assisted on both of Eriksson Ek’s goals, while Brandon Duhaime and Connor Dewar

staked the Wild to a 2-0 lead with short-handed goals 25 seconds apart in the first period.

Marc-Andre Fleury made 27 saves for the victory in his hometown in his first start of the season. Mats Zuccarello had three assists.

Hurricanes 6, Sharks 3: Seth Jarvis scored two power-play goals and visiting Carolina beat San Jose to improve to 2-1 on a six-game trip.

Martin Necas and Stefan Noesen each had a goal and an assist for Carolina, and Brett Pesce and Jaccob Slavin also scored.

Fabian Zetterlund, Filip Zadina and William Eklund scored for the Sharks. They were outshot 42-16.

Golden Knights 3, Stars 2 (SO): Jonathan Marchessault broke a shootout tie in host Vegas’ victory over Dallas in their first meeting since the eventual champions won in six games to advance to the Final.

Marchessault gave Vegas (4-0) a 2-1 edge in the shootout after teammate Shea Theodore and Dallas’ Matt Duchene traded goals. Dallas had a chance to extend the shootout, but Roope Hintz’s shot hit the crossbar.

Avalanche 4, Kraken 1: Arttu

Lehkonen and Logan O’Connor scored their first goals of the season in the second period, Mikko Rantanen added his third with 6:15 remaining and visiting Colorado beat Seattle.

The Avalanche ruined Seattle’s home opener and matched an NHL record for the longest regular-season road winning streak spanning multiple seasons. Colorado won its 14th straight away from home dating to last season, matching the mark set by Buffalo during the 2005-06 and 2006-07 seasons.

Kings 5, Jets 1: Cam Talbot made 26 saves and visiting Los Angeles beat Winnipeg for its first victory of the season.

Trevor Moore had two goals and an assist, Phillip Danault had a goal and two assists, and Arthur Kaliyev had a goal and an assist.

Islanders 1, Coyotes 0: Mathew Barzal scored on a second-period power play, Ilya Sorokin made 14 saves in his first shutout of the season and host New York beat Arizona.

Sabres 3, Lightning 2 (OT): Dylan Cozens scored 1:46 into overtime and host Buffalo beat Tampa Bay for its first victory of the season.

Reyna scores twice in US soccer rout of Ghana

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Gio Reyna ran to the corner flag with a wide smile, then hugged Christian Pulisic and more American teammates. About a half-hour later, Reyna did it again and jumped with an arm overhead in front of the fans and tapped his chest for emphasis.

Reyna scored his first two international goals since a family feud with coach Gregg Berhalter at last year’s World Cup, leading the United States to a 4-0 rout of Ghana in an exhibition on Tuesday night.

“Gio, what I’ve seen from training session number one in this camp was extreme amount of focus and ability,” Berhalter said. “So when he plays like that, like he did this entire camp, he’s certainly a guy that can

help this group, and it’s really good to see him respond like that.”

Reyna put the U.S. ahead in the 10th minute, Pulisic doubled the lead with a penalty kick in the 19th and Folarin Balogun scored in the 22nd to give the Americans three goals in a 12-minute span. Reyna scored again in the 39th for his sixth international goal and first two-goal game for the U.S.

“Besides the goals, it was how he brings players into the attack,” Berhalter said, “how he is able to be calm on the ball and gives us that calm and the poise that we need at times but then is decisive when making final passes.”

Reyna told the U.S. Soccer Federation after the game that he did not want to speak with reporters. He has not spoken with

media following national team matches since the World Cup.

Reyna has been regaining fitness since fracturing a leg last June and played the first half for the second straight match. The 20-year-old midfielder’s first game under Berhalter since the controversy was Saturday’s 3-1 loss to Germany.

After the U.S. started his second term with four friendlies, Berhalter leads the Americans in a two-leg CONCACAF Nations League quarterfinal next month, likely against Trinidad and Tobago. The winner gets a berth in next year’s Copa América.

“We’re still learning. We’re still adapting to the game,” striker Tim Weah said. “We’re on the path that we’re rising and we’re doing well.”