

## Israeli airstrikes rock Beirut's suburbs

*Associated Press*

BEIRUT — Israel carried out a series of massive airstrikes overnight, hitting suburbs of Beirut and cutting off the main border crossing between Lebanon and Syria for tens of thousands of people fleeing Israeli bombardment.

The blasts in Beirut's southern suburbs sent huge plumes of smoke and flames into the night sky and shook buildings miles away in the Lebanese capital. The Israeli military did not comment on what the intended target was, and there was no information yet available on casualties. Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported there were more than 10 consecutive airstrikes in the area.

Meanwhile, Israel's military said that Hezbollah had launched about 100 rockets into Israel on Friday, as fighting continued between Israel and the militant group.

The Israeli military also said Friday that a strike in Beirut the day before killed Mohammed Rashid Skafi, the head of Hez-

bollah's communications division. The military said in a statement that Skafi was "a senior Hezbollah terrorist who was responsible for the communications unit since 2000" and was "closely affiliated" with high-up Hezbollah officials.

Thursday's strike along the Lebanon-Syria border, about 30 miles east of Beirut, led to the closure of the road near the busy Masnaa Border Crossing.

Israel said it had targeted the crossing because it was being used by Hezbollah to transport military equipment across the border. It said fighter jets had struck a tunnel used to smuggle weapons from Iran and others into Lebanon.

Hezbollah is believed to have received weaponry from Iran via Syria. The group has a presence on both sides of the border, a region where it has been fighting alongside Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces.

Associated Press video showed two huge craters on each side of the road. People got out of cars, unable to pass the

site of the strike, carrying bags of their possessions as they crossed on foot.

Tens of thousands of people fleeing war in Lebanon have crossed into Syria over the past two weeks.

The new wave of strikes came after Israel warned people to evacuate communities in southern Lebanon, including but also beyond an area that the United Nations declared a buffer zone after Israel and Hezbollah fought a monthlong war in 2006.

Israel launched a ground incursion into Lebanon on Tuesday and its forces have been clashing with Hezbollah militants in a narrow strip along the border. A series of attacks before the incursion killed some of the group's key members, including longtime leader Hassan Nasrallah.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi arrived Friday in Beirut for meetings with Lebanese officials. He warned that if Israeli carries out an attack on Iran, Tehran would retaliate in a harsh way.

Araghchi's visit to Beirut came three days after Iran launched at least 180 missiles into Israel, the latest in a series of rapidly escalating attacks that threaten to push the Middle East closer to a regionwide war.

"If the Israeli entity takes any step or measure against us, our retaliation will be stronger than the previous one," Araghchi said after meeting Lebanon's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

Iran is Hezbollah's main backer and has sent weapons and billions of dollars to the group over the years.

In the Iranian capital, Tehran, the country's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei led Friday prayers and delivered a speech where he praised the country's recent missile strike on Israel and said Iran was prepared to conduct more strikes if needed.

He spoke to thousands of people at the capital's main prayer site, the Mosalla mosque, which was decorated with a huge Palestinian flag.

## Rutte visits Ukraine in first trip as NATO's new chief

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — New NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte visited Ukraine on Thursday in his first official trip since taking office and pledging the alliance's continued support for Kyiv in its war with Russia.

Rutte met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv as air raid sirens twice went off in the Ukrainian capital.

The new head of NATO vowed when he took office on Tuesday to help shore up West-

ern support for Ukraine, which has been fighting Russia's full-scale invasion since February 2022 and has for most of this year been on the defensive due to a relentless Russian army push in the country's eastern regions.

Rutte expressed confidence that he can work with whomever is elected president of the United States, the alliance's most powerful member, in November. That could be a key moment for Ukraine's effort to ensure continuing Western sup-

port.

Zelenskyy said he discussed with Rutte elements of Ukraine's so-called victory plan, ahead of a NATO meeting at Ramstein Air Base in Germany next week.

The gathering draws together defense leaders from the 50-plus partner nations who regularly meet to coordinate weapons aid for the war.

The two also discussed the battlefield situation and the specific needs of Ukrainian military units. Zelenskyy reiterated

that Ukraine needs more armaments, including long-range weapons it has long requested.

Asked whether the war in the Middle East will affect the timeline he had envisioned for the victory plan, Zelenskyy noted that the U.S. and Britain say Iran has supplied missiles and drones to Russia for use against Ukraine.

He also appealed for Western countries to scrap restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-supplied long-range weapons to strike deep inside Russia.

# Dockworkers' union suspends strike

*Associated Press*

DETROIT — Some 45,000 dockworkers at East and Gulf coast ports are returning to work after their union reached a deal to suspend a strike that could have caused shortages and higher prices if it had dragged on.

The International Longshoremen's Association is suspending its three-day strike until Jan. 15 to provide time to negotiate a new contract. The union and the U.S. Maritime Alliance, which represents ports and shipping companies, said in a joint statement that they have reached a

tentative agreement on wages.

A person briefed on the agreement said the ports sweetened their wage offer from about 50% over six years to 62%. The person didn't want to be identified because the agreement is tentative. Any wage increase would have to be approved by union members as part of the ratification of a final contract.

Talks now turn to the automation of ports, which the unions says will lead to fewer jobs, and other sticking points.

Industry analysts have said that for every day of a port strike

it takes four to six days to recover. But they said a short strike of a few days probably wouldn't gum up the supply chain too badly.

The settlement pushes the strike and any potential shortages past the November presidential election, eliminating a potential liability for Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee. It's also a big plus for the Biden-Harris administration, which has billed itself as the most union-friendly in American history. Shortages could have driven up prices and reignited inflation.

The union went on strike early Tuesday after its contract expired in a dispute over pay and the automation of tasks at 36 ports stretching from Maine to Texas. The strike came at the peak of the holiday season at the ports, which handle about half the cargo from ships coming in to and out of the United States.

Most retailers had stocked up or shipped items early in anticipation of the strike.

"With the grace of God, and the goodwill of neighbors, it's gonna hold," President Joe Biden told reporters Thursday night after the agreement.

## NC sheriff says help on the way for Helene's victims

*Associated Press*

PENSACOLA, N.C. — The search for victims of Hurricane Helene dragged into its second week on Friday, as exhausted rescue crews and volunteers continued to work long days — navigating past washed out roads, downed power lines and mudslides — to reach the isolated and the missing.

"We know these are hard times, but please know we're coming," Sheriff Quentin Miller of Buncombe County, N.C., said at a Thursday evening press briefing. "We're coming to get you. We're coming to pick up our people."

With at least 215 killed, Helene is already the deadliest hurricane to hit the mainland U.S. since Katrina in 2005, and dozens or possibly hundreds of people are still unaccounted for. Roughly half the victims were in North Carolina, while dozens more were killed in South Carolina and Georgia.

In Buncombe County alone,

72 people had been confirmed dead as of Thursday evening, Miller said. Buncombe includes the tourist hub of Asheville, the region's most populous city. The sheriff holds out hope that many of the missing are alive.

His message to them? "Your safety and well-being are our highest priority. And we will not rest until you are secure and that you are being cared for."

Now more than a week since the storm roared onto Florida's Gulf Coast, lack of phone service and electricity continues to hinder efforts to contact the missing. That means search crews must trudge through the mountains to learn whether residents are safe.

Electricity is being slowly restored, and the number of homes and businesses without power dipped below 1 million on Thursday for the first time since last weekend, according to poweroutage.us. Most of the outages are in the Carolinas and Georgia.

## US adds a robust 254,000 jobs; unemployment dips

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — America's employers added a surprisingly strong 254,000 jobs in September, the latest evidence that the U.S. labor market is still solid enough to support steady hiring and a growing economy.

Last month's hiring gain was far more than economists had expected, and it was up sharply from the 159,000 jobs that were added in August. And after rising for most of 2024, the unemployment rate dropped for a second straight month, from 4.2% in August to 4.1% in September, the Labor Department said Friday.

The latest figures suggest that many companies are still confident enough to fill jobs despite the continued pressure of high interest rates. Few employers are laying off workers, though many have grown more cautious about hiring.

In an encouraging sign, the Labor Department also revised

up its estimate of job growth in July and August by a combined 72,000.

The September job gains were fairly broad-based, a healthy trend if it continues. Restaurants and bars added 69,000 jobs. Healthcare companies gained 45,000, government agencies 31,000, social assistance employers 27,000 and construction companies 25,000. A category that includes professional and business services added 17,000 after having lost jobs for three straight months.

Average hourly raises were solid, too. They rose by a higher-than-expected 0.4% from August, slightly less than the 0.5% gain the month before. Measured from a year earlier, hourly wages climbed 4%, up a tick from a 3.9% year-over-year gain in August.

The economy's progress in taming inflation led the Federal Reserve last month to cut its benchmark interest rate by a sizable half-point.

# Cheney backs Harris; Trump rallies in Mich.

Associated Press

RIPON, Wis. — Vice President Kamala Harris campaigned with Republican Liz Cheney in the birthplace of the modern Republican Party on Thursday as the pair delivered a double-barreled denunciation of GOP nominee Donald Trump as a dire threat to democracy.

With some people hoisting signs “Country over Party,” Harris told the crowd that “people of every party must stand together” to reject Trump, citing his refusal to accept the results of the 2020 election and his failure to quell the insurrection of Jan. 6, 2021.

It was an improbable moment — a Democratic nominee giving a nod to a rival party member and to the origins of the opposing party in the closing weeks of a presidential campaign — and it demonstrated how much Harris is attempting to win over moderate and crossover Republican voters.

Harris said of Trump, “He refused to accept the will of the people and to accept the results of an election that was free and fair.”

Cheney is one of Trump’s most ardent antagonists. She is the daughter of former Republican Vice President Dick Cheney and was the top GOP lawmaker on the House committee that investigated the Jan. 6,

2021, insurrection, earning Trump’s disdain and effectively exiling herself from her own party.

“Violence does not and must never determine who rules us. Voters do,” Cheney told the crowd as she recounted Trump refusing to act as he watched the violent attack on television. Someone in the crowd yelled “coward!” Others booed.

Adding to the surreal nature of the event, the crowd cheered references to Dick Cheney and to another Republican former vice president: Mike Pence, who refused to bow to pressure from Trump and attempt to stop the certification in Congress of Biden’s 2020 victory.

“He praised the rioters. He did not condemn them. That’s who Donald Trump is,” Liz Cheney said, while urging the crowd to “meet this moment. I ask you to stand in truth. To reject the depraved cruelty of Donald Trump.”

In an interview Thursday night with Fox News Channel, Trump said of Harris and Cheney: “I think they hurt each other. I think they’re so bad, both of them.”

Cheney lost her Wyoming seat to a Trump-endorsed candidate two years ago and endorsed Harris, the Democratic nominee, last month. The two women appeared together in

Ripon, home to a white schoolhouse where a series of meetings held in 1854 to oppose slavery’s expansion led to the start of the Republican Party.

While Cheney and Harris spoke, the former president took his social media site to say Democrats and prosecutors have lied about the “huge crowd of Patriots gathered in Washington, D.C. on January 6th.”

Harris’ visit to Wisconsin came a day after a federal judge unsealed a 165-page court filing outlining prosecutors’ case against Trump for his attempt to overturn his 2020 election defeat. Trump has pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiracy and obstruction.

Trump didn’t mention the document filed by special counsel Jack Smith or Cheney’s appearance with Harris during an 82-minute speech at a rally in Saginaw County, Mich. In 2020, Biden won the bellwether county by a slim 303 votes, contributing to his victory in the state.

As Trump spoke, his campaign announced he’ll appear in Georgia on Friday with Republican Gov. Brian Kemp. The two men have made peace after Trump in August unleashed a blistering attack on Kemp, whom he has faulted for not giving in to his efforts to overturn his loss in 2020.

During the 2020 campaign, Cheney criticized Harris as “a radical liberal” who “wants to recreate America in the image of what’s happening on the streets of Portland & Seattle,” a reference to unrest that took place in those cities after the murder of George Floyd.

But Jan. 6 was a turning point for Liz Cheney and her family. Both Cheneys are backing Harris, part of a cadre of current and former Republican officials who have broken with the vast majority of their party, which remains in Trump’s corner. Harris wants to portray her candidacy as a patriotic choice for independent and conservative voters who were disturbed by Trump’s unwillingness to cede power.

Trump continues to deny his defeat with false claims of voter fraud.

Harris on Thursday also was endorsed by Cassidy Hutchinson, who was a young White House aide during Trump’s presidency and described during a hearing of Cheney’s Jan. 6 congressional committee how she grew disgusted by Trump’s refusal to stop the rioters that day.

Harris’ campaign also began airing ads targeting Republicans, independents and former Trump voters in battleground states.

## Melania Trump says she supports abortion rights

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Melania Trump revealed her support for abortion rights Thursday ahead of the release of her upcoming memoir, exposing a stark contrast with her husband, Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump, on the crucial election issue.

In a video posted to her X account Thursday morning, the former first lady defended women’s “individual freedoms”

to do what they want with their bodies. The position is at odds with much of the Republican Party and her own husband, who has struggled to find a consistent message on abortion while wedged between anti-abortion supporters within his base and the majority of Americans who support abortion rights.

“Individual freedom is a fundamental principle that I safeguard,” Melania Trump said in

the video. “Without a doubt, there is no room for compromise when it comes to this essential right that all women possess from birth: individual freedom. What does ‘my body, my choice’ really mean?”

The video appears to confirm excerpts of her self-titled memoir reported by The Guardian on Wednesday.

Melania Trump has rarely publicly expressed her personal political views and has been

largely absent from the campaign trail. But in her memoir, set to be released publicly next Tuesday, she argues that the decision to end a pregnancy should be left to a woman and her doctor, “free from any intervention of pressure from the government,” according to the published excerpts.

Melania Trump writes that she has “carried this belief with me throughout my entire adult life.”



# Mixed verdict for 3 officers convicted in Nichols' death

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Three former Memphis police officers were convicted Thursday in the 2023 fatal beating of Tyre Nichols, 29, but were acquitted of the harshest charges they faced for a death that sparked national protests and calls for broad changes in policing.

Jurors deliberated for about six hours before coming back with the mixed verdict for Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley and Justin Smith.

All were convicted of witness tampering related to the cover-up of the beating, but Bean and Smith were acquitted of civil rights charges. Haley was acquitted of violating Nichols' civil rights causing death, but convicted of the lesser charge of violating his civil rights causing bodily injury. He was also convicted of a conspiracy to witness

tamper charge that the others were acquitted of. The court remained silent as the verdicts were read.

The judge ordered all three officers to be taken into custody. He planned to hold a hearing Monday to hear from the defense lawyers about releasing them pending sentencing. The witness tampering charges carry possible sentences of up to 20 years in prison. The civil rights charge against Haley carries up to 10 years in prison. They had faced up to life in prison if convicted on the harshest charges.

The verdict marked a partial setback for prosecutors who were unable to land a conviction for civil rights violations for two officers who played an active role in the encounter. Jurors repeatedly watched graphic clips from police video that showed the officers punch and kick Ni-

chols and hit him with a police baton just steps from his home, as he called out for his mother.

In a statement, Assistant U.S. Attorney General Kristen Clarke, who oversees the Justice Department's civil rights division, said "Tyre Nichols should be alive today."

"We hope this prosecution provides some measure of comfort as the law enforcement officers tied to his death have been held accountable," Clarke said.

Bean and Smith were seen on video wrestling with Nichols and holding his arms, while also hitting him, but the jury was not convinced those actions amounted to civil rights violations. An FBI agent said Smith told him he punched Nichols, but defense lawyers argued Bean and Smith were merely slapping Nichols' hands away as they tried to put handcuffs on him.

# Russian 'spy whale' in Norway wasn't shot

Associated Press

OSLO, Norway — A beluga whale that lived off Norway's coast and whose harness ignited speculation that it was a Russian spy, was not shot to death as claimed by animal rights groups but died of a bacterial infection, Norwegian police said Friday.

A final autopsy by Norway's Veterinary Institute "concludes that the probable cause of death was bacterial infection — possibly as a result of a wound in the mouth from a stuck stick," Amund Preede Revheim, head of the North Sea and Environment section of the police in south-western Norway said.

"There have been no findings from the autopsy that indicate that the whale has been shot," he stressed, adding that the autopsy had been "made difficult by the fact that many of the whale's organs were very rotten." As there was no indication of foul play, there was no reason to start a criminal investigation into its death, he said.

The tame beluga, which was first spotted in 2019 not far from Russian waters with a harness reading "Equipment St. Petersburg," had been nicknamed "Hvaldimir," combining the Norwegian word for whale — hval — and the first name of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

It was found floating in a southern Norway bay on Aug. 31.

In September, animal advocate groups OneWhale and NOAH filed a police report saying that the animal's wounds suggested it was intentionally killed.

They pointed at several wounds found on the animal's skin, including what was interpreted as a bullet hole.

# Judge rules nuclear weapon production sites in US violated environmental rules

Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. — The National Nuclear Security Administration failed to properly evaluate its expansion of plutonium pit production at sites in South Carolina and New Mexico in violation of environmental regulations, a federal judge has ruled.

Plaintiffs challenged a plan consummated in 2018 for two pit production sites — at South Carolina's Savannah River and New Mexico's Los Alamos National Laboratory — that they say relied on an outdated environmental impact study. They also say it didn't truly analyze simultaneous production, and undermined safety and accountability safeguards for a multibillion-dollar nuclear weapons program and related waste disposal.

"Defendants neglected to properly consider the combined effects of their two-site strategy and have failed to convince the court they gave thought to how those effects would affect the environment," Judge Mary Geiger Lewis said in her ruling.

The decision arrives as U.S. authorities this week certified with a "diamond stamp" the first new plutonium pit from Los Alamos for deployment as a key component to nuclear warheads under efforts to modernize the nation's weapons.

Hollow, globe-shaped plutonium pits are placed at the core of nuclear warheads. Plutonium is one of the two key ingredients used to manufacture nuclear weapons, along with highly enriched uranium.

The new ruling from South Carolina's federal court says nuclear weapons regulators violated the National Environmental Policy Act by failing to properly analyze alternatives to production of the nuclear warhead component at Savannah River and Los Alamos.

"These agencies think they can proceed with their most expensive and complex project ever without required public analyses and credible cost estimates," said Jay Coghlan, director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, which is a co-plaintiff to the lawsuit, in a statement Thursday that praised the ruling.

The court order gives litigants two weeks to "reach some sort of proposed compromise" in writing.

# Alonso's home run sends Mets to NLDS

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Pete Alonso was having a rather disappointing evening in what could have been his final game for the New York Mets.

Then everything changed with one swing of the bat.

The slugger broke out of a prolonged slump by smashing a three-run homer off closer Devin Williams in the ninth inning to put the Mets up for good in a 4-2 victory over the Milwaukee Brewers on Thursday in the decisive third game of their NL Wild Card Series.

That made Alonso the first major leaguer to hit a go-ahead homer when his team was trailing in the ninth inning or later of a winner-take-all postseason game, according to OptaSTATS.

"It's just something you practice in the backyard as a kid," Alonso said. "You go through those scenarios as a little kid: All right, you're in the playoffs down by a few runs. Words can't explain. This is just unreal."

Alonso and the Mets advanced to a best-of-five Division Series beginning Saturday in Philadelphia against the NL

East champion Phillies.

The night could have turned out much differently for Alonso.

Milwaukee took a 2-0 lead in the seventh on back-to-back homers from pinch-hitter Jake Bauers and Sal Frelick, and was threatening to add on. The Brewers had runners at second and third with two outs when William Contreras hit a foul pop toward the stands that Alonso was unable to catch against the protective netting, giving the All-Star catcher one more chance to drive in some runs.

"It's baseball," Alonso said. "It's a game of failure. Sometimes it's not the case. Especially in these big games, you've got to move on to the next pitch and make a positive impact, do the best you can, stay within yourself and execute."

The defensive play didn't become a factor once Edwin Díaz struck out Contreras to end that inning. Alonso then came up with the Mets trailing 2-0 but threatening in the ninth.

Francisco Lindor had started the rally by walking on a 3-2 pitch. One out later, Brandon Nimmo singled to put the tying

run on base for Alonso.

The 29-year-old Alonso has gone deep 226 times in his six years with New York — including a 53-homer season as a rookie in 2019.

"He's with Mike Piazza as one of the greatest home run hitters in Mets history," teammate Brandon Nimmo said.

But he hadn't done much lately. Alonso struggled late in the season and hadn't had so much as an extra-base hit since homering on Sept. 19. Nimmo said teammates kept telling Alonso he was just one swing from turning it around.

Adding to the pressure was the unavoidable fact that Alonso is a pending free agent. When he stepped to the plate in the ninth inning, he knew it might be his final time at bat for the Mets.

"And now it's not because he did what big Pete does," Nimmo said.

What he did was send an opposite-field shot over the right-field wall on a 3-1 changeup from Williams, a two-time NL reliever of the year.

"As soon as I hit it I was like, 'Oh yeah, nobody's catching

that,'" Alonso said.

An excited Alonso put his fingers to his mouth in a "chef's kiss" gesture as he rounded first base. The emotions continued spilling out as the Mets added an insurance run.

"No one knows until they go through it what that struggle is like," Nimmo said. "When you're going through the tough times and haven't had an extra-base hit in a couple of weeks, three weeks, whatever it's been, you're just really trying to help the team however you possibly can, but it's not there right now. Like I've told you guys before, you never know when that's going to happen. This game is really, really hard. It can happen in the blink of an eye, and it can be really hard to get out of. And it's hard to maintain your confidence during that."

"So the weight of emotions on him has probably been building up for this last three weeks of that. And the release of that, when you finally come through — and you come through in a gigantic way for your team — it's hard to even put that into words."

## AP source: Reds hiring Terry Francona as manager

Associated Press

Terry Francona needed some time away from baseball. A year was long enough.

One of baseball's most beloved managers, Francona has been hired by the Cincinnati Reds, returning to a team he played for after stepping down in Cleveland following last season because of health reasons.

A person familiar with the situation confirmed the move to

The Associated Press on Thursday night on condition of anonymity because the Reds had not announced the decision. An announcement could come later this week.

Francona, who won two World Series titles with the Boston Red Sox, is replacing David Bell, fired by the Reds last month in the final days of his sixth season. Bell went 409-456 during his tenure.

Francona, who turns 66 in April, played as an outfielder for Cincinnati in 1987. He hit .227 with three homers and 12 RBIs in 102 games.

It's easy to see the appeal of the situation for both Francona and Cincinnati. The Reds went 77-85 this year, but they have one of the game's most dynamic players in Elly De La Cruz and a potentially deep rotation — fronted by Hunter Greene.

Francona helped All-Star third baseman José Ramírez become one of baseball's best all-around players in Cleveland, and he should have no problem commanding the attention of Cincinnati's young roster.

Francona has a 1,950-1,672 record in 23 years as a big-league manager with Philadelphia (1997-2000), the Red Sox (2004-2011) and the Guardians (2013-2023).

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# MLB playoffs to feature Japanese lineage

Two players previously won Sawamura Award as country's top pitcher

BY GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

When the Los Angeles Dodgers and San Diego Padres meet this weekend in the MLB playoffs, each team will have an expatriate Japanese baseball star who was honored as Japan's top starting pitcher before making the jump to the United States.

The Dodgers' Yoshinobu Yamamoto and the Padres' Yu Darvish have won the Sawamura Award.

It is named for Eiji Sawamura, a Japanese star pitcher of the 1930s who was killed in combat fighting U.S. troops during World War II.

Professional baseball teams from America first visited Japan in 1908, well after baseball had become a national obsession in the country. The pinnacle each year was the high school championships played at Koshein Stadium outside of Osaka. The ballpark still stands and copies Chicago's Wrigley Field with the outfield walls draped in ivy.

The biggest and most famous barnstorming teams arrived in Asia in 1934 when Philadelphia Athletics owner-manager Connie Mack brought a team of American League stars. Tensions between the U.S. and Japan were already on the rise over battleship construction, American limits on oil sales and Japan's invasion of neighboring China.

However, lucrative offers from Japanese business interests brought the American ballplayers over for a tour.

The American team included all-time greats such as Lou Gehrig, Jimmie Foxx and Charlie Gehringer. But the legend who attracted adulation wherever the team went was Babe Ruth.

Buoyed by the attention, Ruth

went on a hitting rampage, hammering 13 home runs. His first homer of the series landed in Sendai Zoo, where the Japanese built a monument to the blast, and he was photographed surrounded by cheering fans, clowning with children and wearing traditional Japanese formal wear.

The Americans regularly steamrolled their way to victory against Japanese pickup teams put together on the fly to play the All-Stars. They ended the tour undefeated.

But for one day, Japan saw the sluggers tamed by a teenager.

Sawamura was a late addition to one team of locals scraped up to face the American stars. The starting pitcher was pulled after four innings of shutout ball and Sawamura took the mound.

The youngster struck out Gehrig. Then Ruth, Gehrig and Foxx. He finished with nine strikeouts but was saddled with the 1-0 loss when Ruth hit a home run in the seventh inning.

"The first real game the barnstormers have played in Japan," The New York Times reported Nov. 21, 1934. "Sawamura fanned the major league stars and had a brilliant shutout but for Ruth's home run."

The final score did not overshadow the excitement among Japanese fans and newspapers in Tokyo and Osaka, which filled headlines with Sawamura's heroics.

On the Americans' return to the U.S., Connie Mack was asked about Japanese attitudes toward them. He admitted there was a strong sense of anti-Americanism but suggested baseball was an antidote.

"Then Babe Ruth smacked a home run, and all the ill feeling and underground war sentiment vanished just like that!" Mack said.

Sawamura went on to play with the Yomiuri Giants in the newly formed pro league in Japan. He threw three no-hitters

and was the league MVP in 1937.

Relations between the U.S. and Japan soured further as Japanese troops marched across Asia, occupying much of China.

The military dictatorship that controlled Japan under the symbolic leadership of Emperor Hirohito banned many Western influences — jazz music, Hollywood films, and Western clothing and hairstyles for women.

Baseball was an exception. Military authorities told teams to drop American names and English characters from their uniforms. The Giants became the Kyojin — Japanese for giants.

The Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 brought the United States into World War II. Ruth, by then retired, famously opened the windows of his apartment in New York City and tossed out his collection of ceramic gifts from the 1934 trip to Japan.

Sawamura and other players split time between the Army and baseball, playing each season even as American troops pushed back across the Pacific at Wake Island, Tarawa, Rabaul and Guadalcanal.

Until 1943, the Nippon Professional Baseball played 80 games. The 1944 season was only 35 games.

Sawamura served a combat tour from 1938 to 1940 in China, then was called back into service in 1941 as part of the Japanese army's drive to push the Americans out of the Philippines.

But most years, Japanese baseball records show Sawamura was sent home to pitch, throwing his third career no-hitter in July 1940. Sawamura was officially discharged in 1942.

However, Sawamura and other veterans were called back to service as Allied troops neared the Japanese mainland.

In late 1944, units from Sawamura's division boarded the

SS Hawaii Maru bound to reinforce Japanese forces in Borneo. The transport was making its way along the coast of Kyushu when it was spotted by the U.S. Navy submarine USS Sea Devil. The submarine's torpedoes sent the ship to the bottom in minutes, including the 27-year-old Sawamura.

"Nippon's greatest pitcher went to war and never came back," wrote Robert Weintraub, author of "The Victory Season — The End of World War II and the Birth of Baseball's Golden Age."

After the Japanese surrender in 1945, American occupation authorities encouraged a return of baseball in the country.

The American game was still beloved in Japan, and soon, the pro leagues were playing within the rubble of Tokyo and the atomic blast wreckage of Hiroshima.

Play resumed in 1947, and a new award for the top starting pitcher, the Sawamura Award, was given out annually. Sawamura's number 14 was retired by the Giants, and he was elected to the Nippon Professional Baseball Hall of Fame in 1959.

In the years since, the award has been won by players who would go on to careers in the United States, including Hideo Nomo and Kenta Maeda of the Los Angeles Dodgers, Daisuke Matsuzaka and Koji Uehara of the Boston Red Sox, and Masahiro Tanaka of the Yankees.

Yu Darvish, now with the Padres, won the award in 2007. Yamamoto won three consecutive awards in 2021, 2022 and 2023 before signing in the offseason with the Dodgers.

Darvish must now face Japanese star pitcher-hitter Shohei Ohtani, now with the Dodgers. Ohtani's ability to be an ace pitcher and a leading home-run hitter has frequently drawn comparisons to a legendary American player who helped create Sawamura's legend — Babe Ruth.



# Cousins leads Falcons past Bucs in OT

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Kirk Cousins sure earned all that money Thursday night.

The \$180 million quarterback threw for a career-high 509 yards and four touchdowns, the last of them a 45-yard scoring pass to KhaDarel Hodge in overtime that gave the Atlanta Falcons an improbable 36-30 victory over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

“What a night,” Cousins said. “I’m exhausted.”

After a wild fourth quarter that featured a blocked field goal, a fumble and an interception, Cousins and the Falcons (3-2) got the ball back at their own 20 with 1:14 remaining in regulation and no timeouts, trailing 30-27.

Cousins completed five passes to push Atlanta to the Buccaneers 29, then hustled to the line

to spike the ball with a single second left. In all the confusion, the Falcons were called for delay of game as they lined up for a tying field goal, but it didn’t cost them.

Even with the five-yard penalty, Youngblood Koo knocked it through from 52 yards to force overtime, one week after he made a 58-yarder with 2 seconds left to beat the New Orleans Saints.

“I’m proud of the grit,” Cousins said. “In this league, that’s what it takes. We were gritty tonight.”

The Falcons won the coin toss in overtime and made sure Baker Mayfield and the Buccaneers (3-2) didn’t get their hands on the ball again.

Cousins connected with Drake London on a couple of passes before throwing a short one to Hodge, who broke a tackle at the 40, sliced through a gap in the

secondary and raced untouched to the end zone to end the game.

The four TD passes tied Cousins’ career best, while his yardage through the air easily eclipsed his previous high of 460 with the Minnesota Vikings in 2022.

“The guys played hard,” coach Raheem Morris said. “They played to the end.”

After signing his big free agent deal with the Falcons, which included \$100 million in guaranteed money, Cousins got off to a sluggish start in Atlanta.

But he heard nothing but cheers on a night when the Falcons inducted longtime starting quarterback Matt Ryan into their Ring of Honor. The 36-year-old Cousins even swayed to the rap hit “Swag Surfin’” during the postgame celebration, firmly establishing his chops in the ATL.

With Matty Ice cheering him on, Cousins broke Ryan’s team record for passing yards in a game (503) with one of the most prolific performances in NFL history. Only 14 quarterbacks have thrown for more yards in a game, led by Norm Van Brocklin’s mark of 554 yards that has stood since 1951.

“Outstanding,” Morris said in a succinct but fitting assessment of Cousins’ performance.

Mayfield threw three touchdown passes, including a pair to Mike Evans, and Chase McLaughlin booted three field goals. The last of them was a 53-yarder that put the Buccaneers ahead 30-27 with 10:23 remaining.

Mayfield felt like he let this one slip away.

“All I care about is wins,” he said. “I’ve got to find a way to finish that game out on offense.”

## Mahomes, Witt have Kansas City teams eyeing titles

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — They were the sons of big league ballplayers, the lazy summer days of their youth spent listening to stories about baseball.

Their dads were both journeyman pitchers — maybe faced each other a time or two — who bounced from team to team as they tried to carve out long and productive careers, even as their kids grew up in east Texas, just a couple of hours apart.

Yet at some point, the paths of Patrick Mahomes and Bobby Witt Jr. diverged. One stepped off the infield and onto the football field, his first love giving way to his lifelong passion, and the other continued a remarkable trajectory toward baseball stardom.

Years later, their paths are crossing again. Mahomes is now the record-setting quarterback of the Chiefs, the leader of an unbeaten team chasing an unprecedented third consecutive Super Bowl title. And he is a

part owner of the Royals, who are in their first AL Division Series in a decade thanks largely to an MVP-caliber season from Witt, their star shortstop.

They face the Yankees in the best-of-five series beginning Saturday night in New York.

They’ve formed the kind of bond that rarely exists for the sons of professional athletes: that of a shared background.

Pat Mahomes broke into the big leagues with Minnesota in 1991, the young right-hander getting drafted right out of Lindale High School. His son came along four years later, and pictures exist of a young Patrick Mahomes dressed in a Twins uniform, held by his father and his mother, Randi Martin, before a game at the Metrodome.

By that point, Bobby Witt already had a decade in the big leagues. He began his career with the Rangers in 1986 and proceeded to pitch for six other clubs before finishing his career with the Diamondbacks in 2001.

Along the way, Bobby Witt Jr. was born — the only son to go with three daughters in a busy household in Colleyville, Texas.

That both ended up in Kansas City seems somehow serendipitous.

In the case of Mahomes, who starred in college at Texas Tech, he took over a franchise that was respectable and turned it into a juggernaut. He won his first Super Bowl title in his second year as the starter, and with the Chiefs off to a 4-0 start heading into Monday night’s game against the Saints, he has them chasing a record third in a row.

Witt was drafted second overall by the Royals out of Colleyville Heritage High School, rocketed through the minor leagues and broke into the big leagues two years ago. He quickly became the face of a team that had fallen on hard times, losing 106 games a year ago, and helped to turn it around with his preternatural maturity and extraordinary ability.

Witt won the AL batting title this year as the Royals secured a wild-card spot in the playoffs. Then, he drove in both go-ahead runs as they beat the Orioles 1-0 and 2-1 in consecutive games this week to earn a date with the Yankees.

“This is what you dream about,” Witt said amid a sparkling wine celebration in Baltimore. “My 15-year-old self, I was dreaming, so now we’re here. Now we’ve got this opportunity right here, so we’ve got to make the most of it.”

One of the smallest markets in professional sports with two of their games’ biggest stars.

“It’s great for the city,” Mahomes said with a smile. “I’ve heard all the stories about how awesome the environment was the last time the Royals were in the playoffs. And they’re going up against a great baseball team — a historic team. I’m excited for these guys. They are hungry. They’re playing some great baseball.”

# Clark is named WNBA Rookie of the Year

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — Caitlin Clark has been named the WNBA Rookie of the Year in a near-unanimous vote, giving the Indiana Fever back-to-back winners after Aliyah Boston won the honor last season.

A national panel of sportswriters and sportscasters gave Clark 66 of 67 votes in balloting released Thursday. Chicago Sky forward Angel Reese received the other.

"I am incredibly honored to be named Rookie of the Year, but more than that, I am grateful to everyone that supported me throughout this past season — my family and friends, my teammates, the Fever organization and everyone that cheered us on all season. I am so proud of what we accomplished and so excited for what the future holds," Clark said in a statement.

Clark, the No. 1 overall pick from Iowa, averaged 19.2 points

and a league-best 8.4 assists per game while helping the WNBA set attendance records and garner mainstream attention.

She struggled a bit early in the season, but found her groove and was an All-Star starter. Clark led the Fever to the playoffs for the first time since 2016 and a 20-20 record after a 1-8 start.

"I'm a tough grader. I feel like I had a solid year," Clark said after the Fever were eliminated in the first round of the playoffs. "For me, the fun part is like I feel like I'm just scratching the surface and I'm the one that's nitpicking every single thing I do."

"I know I want to help this franchise. ... I know there's a lot of room for me to continue to improve, so that's what excites me the most. I feel like I continue to get a lot better."

Clark was not chosen for the U.S. Olympic team — a decision that disappointed her legions of

fans — but she showed in the weeks afterward that she might have been helpful. The Fever guard averaged 24.7 points and 9.3 assists in her first 10 games after the Olympic break and led Indiana to an 8-2 record.

Clark was named the Eastern Conference Player of the Month for August, was Player of the Week three times and Rookie of the Month four times. She recorded the first two triple-doubles by a rookie in WNBA history, set a league single-game record with 19 assists and became the first rookie to have at least 30 points and 10 assists in a game.

Clark led the league with 122 3-pointers, was second with 90.6% accuracy from the free-throw line and averaged 5.7 rebounds and 1.3 steals. She set a league single-season record with 337 assists and set rookie records of 769 points and 122 three-pointers made.

Reese averaged 13.6 points

and 13.1 rebounds for the Sky.

Off the court, Clark, Reese and their fellow rookies were a ratings and attendance boon for the WNBA. Six different league television partners set viewership records this year for its highest viewed WNBA game. All of those games included the Fever.

Indiana led the league in attendance both at home and on the road. The Fever averaged 17,036 at home and more than 15,000 on the road. Four teams moved home games to bigger arenas when Indiana came to town to accommodate more fans.

Despite Indiana's blowout loss to Connecticut in Game 1, fans tuned in as the game averaged 1.8 million viewers, according to ESPN, making it the WNBA's most watched playoff game since the 2000 Finals. It was the most watched playoff game on ESPN ever despite going up against the NFL.

## Augusta National chairman confident Masters will go on

*Associated Press*

Augusta National Chairman Fred Ridley said Thursday he was confident the Masters would be held as scheduled in April as the club directs its attention and resources to helping the area recover from devastating damage from Hurricane Helene.

Augusta National and the Community Foundation for the Central Savannah River Area announced a joint \$5 million donation to a fund providing essential services throughout the greater Augusta area.

Ridley was a few days late arriving in Japan for the Asia-Pacific Amateur. He said the home of the Masters sustained "a lot of damage," just like the rest of the Georgia city on the border with South Carolina.

"We've had literally dozens of people working at the club and what I've really been the most proud of is while everyone certainly is focused on getting us back up and running, our employees have been so focused on the community at large," Ridley said at a news conference to kick off the Asia-Pacific Amateur.

"As far as the golf course, it really was affected just as the rest of the community was," he said. "There was a lot of damage. We have a lot of people working hard to get us back up and running. We don't really know exactly what that's going to mean, but I can tell you if it's humanly possible, we'll be back in business sooner rather than later."

The Masters is scheduled for April 10-13.

## LeBron James, Davis to play in preseason games

*Associated Press*

LeBron James and Anthony Davis will play at some point during the Los Angeles Lakers' first two preseason games this weekend, getting the two superstars back to work quickly after a busy summer that included Olympic gold.

James and Davis could play in one or both games, new coach JJ Redick said Thursday. Los Angeles will face Minnesota on Friday and Phoenix on Sunday in Palm Desert, Calif.

"They're going to play this weekend, but we're still talking through what minutes and rotations look like for everybody," Redick said after the Lakers' third practice of training camp.

That means James could be on the court at Acrisure Arena this weekend with Bronny

James, his oldest son and the Lakers' second-round draft pick. No father and son have ever played in the NBA at the same time, let alone on the same team.

LeBron and Bronny are both anticipating that moment — and so are the rest of the Lakers, who can see the James family's natural competitiveness coming out already in camp.

"It's fantastic to be able to be here and witness it in practice," Davis said Wednesday. "Bronny hit a 3 over (LeBron), (and) everybody was talking smack in Bronny's favor. Then Bron came down and just bullied somebody and got a layup. ... Even though they weren't matched up, the competition is there, and that's what we love to see."