

## Judge blocks firing of workers in shutdown

*Associated Press*

SAN FRANCISCO — A federal judge on Wednesday temporarily blocked President Donald Trump's administration from firing workers during the government shutdown, saying the cuts appeared to be politically motivated and were being carried out without much thought.

U.S. District Judge Susan Illston in San Francisco repeatedly pressed the assistant U.S. attorney to explain the administration's rationale for the more than 4,100 layoff notices that started going out Friday even though furloughed workers can not access their work emails and there are no human resources specialists to assist with next steps.

"It's very much ready, fire, aim on most of these programs, and it has a human cost," she said. "It's a human cost that cannot be tolerated."

She granted a temporary restraining order blocking the job cuts, saying she believed the evidence would ultimately show the cuts were illegal and in excess of authority.

Asked for comment, the White House referred The Associated Press to the Office of Management and Budget. The budget office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The American Federation of Government Employees and other federal labor unions had asked Illston to block the administration from issuing new layoff notices and implementing those that were already sent out. The unions said the firings were an abuse of power designed to punish workers and pressure Congress.

"The president seems to think his government shutdown is distracting people from the harm-

ful and lawlessness actions of his administration, but the American people are holding him accountable, including in the courts," said Skye Perryman, president and CEO of legal organization Democracy Forward. "Our civil servants do the work of the people, and playing games with their livelihoods is cruel and unlawful and a threat to everyone in our nation."

Illston's order came as the shutdown, which started Oct. 1, entered its third week.

The Trump administration has been paying the military and pursuing its crackdown on immigration while slashing jobs in health and education, including in special education and after-school programs.

Trump said programs favored by Democrats are being targeted and "they're never going to come back, in many cas-

es."

In a court filing, the administration said it planned to fire more than 4,100 employees across eight agencies.

In a related case, Illston had blocked the administration from carrying out much of its plans to reduce the size of the federal workforce. But the Supreme Court said the administration could continue firing workers while the lawsuit is pending.

The unions say the layoff notices are an illegal attempt at political pressure and retribution and are based on the false premise that a temporary funding lapse eliminates Congress' authorization of agency programs.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Elizabeth Hedges said in court Wednesday that the district court lacks jurisdiction to hear employment decisions made by federal agencies.

## Army says it has doubled number of delayed-entry recruits

**By ROSE L. THAYER**

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Army not only beat its recruiting goal last fiscal year by 1,000 enlistees, but it entered this year with double the number of recruits on its delayed entry roster than the year before.

With 22,000 recruits waiting to ship out, the Army now has predictability in sending soldiers to boot camp and the cushion to build on the changes it made to recruiting over the past four years to modernize how it fills its ranks, said Brig. Gen. Sara Dudley, commander of Army Recruiting Division at Fort Knox, Ky.

The Army's goal for fiscal 2026, which began Oct. 1, is to recruit 60,000 soldiers. Last year it aimed

for 61,000 new soldiers and signed on 62,050.

Division staff members are revisiting where the Army assigns recruiters, how and where to point them to find prospective soldiers, and restructuring the headquarters personnel to better serve the mission, Dudley said during an interview Tuesday alongside Command Sgt. Maj. Danny Basham, the senior non-commissioned officer in the division.

"That has just not been able to happen because we've just been in a firefight trying to get people into the Army," Dudley said. "We have a lot of transformation that's still left to happen because we want to be good stewards with the amount of NCOs that we're asking to bring to us from the Army."

The Army, like the Navy and Air Force, struggled to find enough people willing to fill its ranks coming out of the coronavirus pandemic.

The service missed its goal in 2022 and 2023 but has since rebounded, in part due to the measures it took to overhaul how it recruits.

The Army also launched the Future Soldier Prep Course to help people interested in enlisting but unable to qualify because they don't meet academic or fitness standards.

Army Secretary Dan Driscoll said Monday in his opening remarks to the Association of the U.S. Army's annual conference that 2025 was the Army's best recruiting year in 13 years.

"The future of the Army is lin-

ing up. Americans are courageously stepping forward to serve, and our Army should reflect the greatness of that choice," he said.

Now, the Army is scheduling recruits out through March to attend boot camp, which has allowed it to modify the number of people it sends to the prep course, Dudley said. In the past, prospects could attend for both fitness and education. Now they can only need improvement in one area, she said.

The Army also tightened the standards people must meet to qualify for the prep course. The amount of body fat the potential recruit needs to lose dropped from 8% to 6% and test scores must be closer to passing, Dudley said.

# Marines to fire HIMARS near Mount Fuji

BY BRIAN McELHINEY  
AND KEISHI KOJA

*Stars and Stripes*

The Marine Corps plans to fire the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, or HIMARS, for the first time at a training range near Mount Fuji, according to U.S. Forces Japan.

Members of 3rd Battalion, 12th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, based at Camp Hansen on Okinawa, will fire nonexplosive training missiles at Higashi-Fuji Maneuver Area on Oct. 27, USFJ spokesman Col. John Severns said Thursday.

It will be the first HIMARS firing by Marines at the range in Shizuoka prefecture, he said. Backup dates are slated for Oct. 28 and 29 in case of bad weather.

"The training is enabling us to maintain a lethal and credible defense posture with our Japa-

nese allies," Severns said. "That is an essential part of deterring aggression and preserving stability in the region."

Severns did not know how many Marines or HIMARS launchers would deploy. The division acknowledged follow-up questions but did not provide responses Thursday.

The Marines last fired HIMARS at the Yausubetsu Maneuver Area on Hokkaido, Sept. 14-24, according to a Japanese Ministry of Defense document posted by Betsukai town's website.

That training was part of the Resolute Dragon exercise, held Sept. 11-25 across Japan, and also involved Japan's Multiple Launch Rocket System.

The 3rd Marine Division first fired HIMARS in Japan at Yausubetsu during the Northern Viper joint training exercise in 2017, according to U.S. Indo-Pa-

cific Command.

Higashi-Fuji was chosen for the upcoming HIMARS training because of its accessibility, realistic terrain and ample space, as well as the need to train in multiple environments, Severns said.

"It's essential that we have the ability to conduct HIMARS training at more than one area in Japan," he said.

HIMARS training has typically taken place about once a year at Yausubetsu, Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani said during his regular news conference Tuesday in Tokyo.

"However, given the security environment in the Indo-Pacific region, it is important to further strengthen the deterrence and response capabilities of the Japan-U.S. alliance," he said.

On Oct. 7, the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force trained with its Multiple Launch Rocket Sys-

tem at Higashi-Fuji for the first time, a Gotemba city spokesman said Thursday.

Nakatani and other Defense Ministry officials met with representatives from Oyama town and Gotemba and Susuno cities to discuss the upcoming exercise, a South Kanto Defense Bureau spokesman said Wednesday.

The three municipalities submitted questions to the defense bureau and are expected to meet again Saturday, the Gotemba city spokesman said. He declined to specify what was discussed. The range lies within their jurisdictions.

The municipalities will decide their position on the exercise "based on the responses from the Ministry of Defense," the spokesman said.

Some Japanese government officials speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

## Journalists leave Pentagon over new reporting rules

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — Dozens of reporters turned in access badges and exited the Pentagon on Wednesday rather than agree to government-imposed restrictions on their work, pushing journalists who cover the American military further from the seat of its power. The nation's leadership called the new rules "common sense" to help regulate a "very disruptive" press.

News outlets were nearly unanimous in rejecting new rules imposed by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth that would leave journalists vulnerable to expulsion if they sought to report on information — classified or otherwise — that had not been approved by Hegseth.

Many of the reporters waited to leave together at a 4 p.m. deadline set by the Defense De-

partment to get out of the building. As the hour approached, boxes of documents lined a Pentagon corridor and reporters carried chairs, a copying machine, books and old photos to the parking lot from suddenly abandoned workspaces. Shortly after 4, about 40 to 50 journalists left together after handing in badges.

"It's sad, but I'm also really proud of the press corps that we stuck together," said Nancy Youssef, a reporter for The Atlantic who has had a desk at the Pentagon since 2007.

It is unclear what practical impact the new rules will have, though news organizations vowed they'd continue robust coverage of the military no matter the vantage point.

Stars and Stripes joined the walkout, though the new rules

were not presented to the organization, Editor in Chief Erik Slavin said.

"Stars and Stripes operates according to the same journalistic principles of an independent media entity," Slavin said. "While the Pentagon's media in-brief guidelines are required for non-government entities and have not been presented to us, some provisions would compromise our congressionally mandated function as a First Amendment news organization. Our organization will maintain its commitment to journalistic independence and continue reporting on issues vital to members of the U.S. armed forces and the military community across the globe."

Images of reporters effectively demonstrating against barriers to their work are unlikely

to move supporters of President Donald Trump, many of whom resent journalists and cheer his efforts to make their jobs harder. Trump has been involved in court fights against The New York Times, CBS News, ABC News, the Wall Street Journal and The Associated Press.

Speaking to reporters at the White House on Tuesday, Trump backed his defense secretary's new rules. "I think he finds the press to be very disruptive in terms of world peace," Trump said. "The press is very dishonest."

"What they're really doing, they want to spoon-feed information to the journalist, and that would be their story. That's not journalism," said Jack Keane, a retired U.S. Army general and Fox News analyst, said on Hegseth's former network.

# Trump plans talks with Putin after meeting with Zelenskyy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Thursday he will meet again with Russia's Vladimir Putin in an effort to end the war in Ukraine. A date has not been set, but Trump wrote on social media that the meeting would take place in Budapest, Hungary.

"I believe great progress was made with today's telephone conversation," Trump wrote after talking to Putin. They previously met in Alaska in August, which did not produce a diplomatic breakthrough.

Before Trump and Putin meet, U.S. officials led by Secretary of State Marco Rubio will sit down with Russian representatives next week. It's unclear where that meeting will take place.

The call came ahead of Trump's meeting on Friday at the White House with Ukrai-

nian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who has been pressing Trump to sell Kyiv Tomahawk missiles that would allow Ukrainian forces to strike deeper into Russian territory. Zelenskyy has argued such strikes would help compel Putin to take Trump's calls for direct negotiations between Russia and Ukraine to end the war more seriously.

Trump had told reporters traveling with him to Israel on Sunday that he had planned to discuss the Tomahawks with Putin as a way to pressure him to end Russia's war in Ukraine. "Do they want to have Tomahawks going in that direction? I don't think so," Trump said on Sunday. "I think I might speak to Russia about that."

With a fragile Israel-Hamas ceasefire and hostage deal holding, Trump has said he's now turning his attention to bringing

the war in Ukraine to an end and is weighing providing Kyiv long-range weaponry as he looks to prod Moscow to the negotiating table.

Ending the wars in Ukraine and Gaza was central to Trump's 2024 reelection pitch, in which he persistently pilloried President Joe Biden for his handling of the conflicts. Yet, like his predecessor, Trump also has been stymied by Putin as he's unsuccessfully pressed the Russian leader to hold direct talks with Zelenskyy to end the war, which is nearing its fourth year.

But fresh off the Gaza ceasefire, Trump is showing new confidence that he can finally make headway on ending the Russian invasion.

He's also signaling that he's ready to step up pressure on Putin if he doesn't come to the table soon.

## Alaskans evacuated by Guard after typhoon

The Washington Post

Officials are evacuating hundreds of Alaskans after a powerful storm system hammered the state's western coast this week, in what the National Guard described as one of the largest airlifts in the state's recent history.

In the aftermath of Typhoon Halong, extreme winds toppled homes and a storm surge flooded villages, triggering a sprawling multiagency rescue effort. The isolated villages of Kipnuk and Kwigillingok were the worst hit.

Overnight, officials said, they evacuated 300 displaced people from a regional shelter that had reached capacity in Bethel, in western Alaska, about 400 miles to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage.

Typhoon Halong was one of the strongest storms the region has experienced on record, picking up extra fuel from a record-breaking marine heat wave spanning the North Pacific Ocean as it raced toward Alaska. Winds gusted up to 107 mph as the storm pushed into western Alaska, causing water to pile up and push inland as a devastating storm surge—reaching 6.6 feet in Kipnuk, nearly two feet above the previous record.

Coastal communities such as Kipnuk, located on a riverbank a few miles inland from the Bering Sea, have grown more vulnerable to these storms as the climate has warmed and sea ice has dwindled, according to Alaska climate experts. Melting permafrost that has contributed to widespread erosion and repeated floods have damaged infrastructure.

A 67-year-old woman was found dead, and two men, ages 71 and 41, were missing, the state's Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management said Wednesday.

## Special operations helicopters near Venezuela expand Caribbean mission

The Washington Post

The U.S. military's special operations aviation unit appears to have flown in Caribbean waters less than 90 miles from the coast of Venezuela in recent days, according to a visual analysis.

The helicopters were engaged in training exercises, according to a U.S. official, that could serve as preparation for expanded conflict against alleged drug traffickers, including potentially missions inside Venezuela.

The U.S. military has struck at least five boats allegedly carrying illegal narcotics in international waters, killing at least 27 people, according to U.S. officials, the last one occurring on Tuesday. President Donald

Trump said Wednesday he had authorized the Central Intelligence Agency to conduct missions inside the country.

The U.S. has declared it is in "armed conflict" with drug traffickers, though lawmakers have said the strikes are unlawful killings of people who are suspected criminals and not battlefield combatants.

Visuals that circulated on social media in early October appeared to show MH-6 Little Bird attack helicopters and MH-60 Black Hawks over open water near oil and gas platforms. A visual analysis of the platforms and visible terrain indicates the helicopters were flying off Trinidad's northeast coast, bringing them within 90

miles of several points along Venezuela's coastline.

The aircraft are likely operated by the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, said Mark Cancian, a senior adviser with the Center for Strategic and International Studies. The unit flies missions for Navy SEALs, Green Berets and Delta Force and has gained renown for undertaking complex and dangerous operations such as the raid to kill Osama bin Laden.

The inclusion of Little Birds—small attack aircraft designed to insert operators onto the ground and provide close air support—suggests preparations for potential missions that could see U.S. boots on the ground, Cancian said.



# Russian attack causes blackouts in Ukraine

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia battered Ukraine's energy facilities with hundreds of drones and dozens of missiles in its latest heavy bombardment of the country's power grid, authorities said Thursday, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy prepared to ask President Donald Trump at a White House meeting for more American-made air defenses and long-range missiles.

Eight Ukrainian regions experienced blackouts after the barrage, Ukraine's national

energy operator, Ukrenergo, said. DTEK, the country's largest private energy company, reported outages in the capital, Kyiv, and said it had to stop its natural gas extraction in the central Poltava region due to the strikes. Natural gas infrastructure was damaged for the sixth time this month, Ukraine's oil and gas company said.

Zelenskyy said Russia fired more than 300 drones and 37 missiles at Ukraine overnight. He accused Russia of using cluster munitions and conducting repeated strikes on the same

target to hit crews working to repair the grid.

"This fall, the Russians are using every single day to strike our energy infrastructure," Zelenskyy said on Telegram.

The Ukrainian power grid has been one of Russia's main targets since its invasion of its neighbor more than three years ago. Attacks increase as the bitterly cold months approach in a Russian strategy that Ukrainian officials call "weaponizing winter."

Ukrainian forces have resisted Russia's bigger and better

equipped army, limiting it to a grinding war of attrition along the roughly 600-mile front line snaking through eastern and southern regions.

But Ukraine, which is almost the size of Texas, is hard to defend from the air in its entirety, and Kyiv officials are seeking more Western help to fend against aerial attacks and strike back at Russia.

Zelenskyy was expected to arrive in the United States on Thursday, ahead of his Oval Office meeting with Trump on Friday.

# Israel receives remains of 2 more hostages

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israel received the remains of two more hostages Wednesday, hours after the Israeli military said that one of the bodies previously turned over was not that of a hostage. The confusion added to tensions over the fragile truce that has paused the two-year war.

The coffins carrying the remains were transferred by the Red Cross from Hamas. Upon returning to Israel, they were sent to a forensic lab in Tel Aviv. The military in a statement cautioned that the hostages' identities had yet to be verified.

Meanwhile, the Gaza Health Ministry said it received 45 more bodies of Palestinians from Israel, another step in implementation of the ceasefire agreement. That brought to 90 the total number of bodies re-

turned to Gaza for burial. The forensics team examining the remains said they showed signs of mistreatment.

As part of the deal, four bodies of hostages were handed over by Hamas on Tuesday, following four on Monday that were returned hours after the last 20 living hostages were released from Gaza. In all, Israel has been awaiting the return of the bodies of 28 hostages.

The Israeli military said forensic testing showed that "the fourth body handed over to Israel by Hamas does not match any of the hostages." There was no immediate word on whose body it was.

In exchange for the release of the hostages, Israel freed around 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees Monday.

Israel is expected to turn over more bodies, though officials

have not said how many are in its custody or how many will be returned.

It is unclear whether the remains belong to Palestinians who died in Israeli custody or were taken from Gaza by Israeli troops.

Throughout the war, Israel's military has exhumed bodies as part of its search for remains.

As forensic teams examined the first remains returned, the Health Ministry on Wednesday released images of 32 unidentified bodies to help families recognize missing relatives.

Many appeared decomposed or burned. Some were missing limbs or teeth, while others were coated in sand and dust. Health officials have said Israeli restrictions on allowing DNA testing equipment into Gaza have often forced morgues to rely on physical features and

clothing for identification.

The forensics team that received the bodies said some arrived still shackled or bearing signs of physical abuse.

Sameh Hamad, a member of a commission tasked with receiving the bodies at Khan Younis' Nasser Hospital, said some arrived with their hands and legs cuffed. "There are signs of torture and executions," he told The Associated Press.

The bodies, he said, belonged to men ages 25 to 70. Most had bands on their necks.

Most of the bodies wore civilian clothing, but some were in uniforms, suggesting they were militants.

Hamad said the Red Cross provided names for only three of the dead, leaving many families uncertain of their relatives' fate. The fighting has killed nearly 68,000 Palestinians.

# Houthi official dies of wounds suffered in strike

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — An Israeli airstrike targeting top leaders among Yemen's Houthi rebels in August killed the chief of staff of its military, officials said Thursday,

further escalating the tensions between the group and Israel even as a ceasefire holds.

The Houthis first acknowledged the killing of Maj. Gen. Muhammad Abdul Karim al-Ghamari, who had been sanc-

tioned by the United Nations.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz a short time later claimed the killing, saying that al-Ghamari had died of wounds he suffered in the attack.

The United Nations de-

scribed him as playing "the leading role in orchestrating the Houthis' military efforts that are directly threatening the peace, security and stability of Yemen, as well as cross-border attacks against Saudi Arabia."

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Officials confirm case of chikungunya virus

**NY** MINEOLA — A person living in New York has tested positive for the chikungunya virus in what state health officials say is the first reported transmission of the mosquito-borne illness within the United States in six years.

The state Department of Health said Tuesday that the virus, which has been spreading in China and elsewhere, was identified in a person living in Nassau County on Long Island.

The county's health department said the person began experiencing symptoms in August after having traveled outside of the region, but not out of the country.

## State carries out record 14th execution this year

**FL** STARKE — A man convicted of the 1996 killings of two women whose bodies were left in a rural pond was put to death Tuesday evening in a record 14th execution in Florida this year.

Samuel Lee Smithers, 72, was pronounced dead at 6:15 p.m. following a lethal injection at Florida State Prison near Starke. Smithers was convicted in 1999 of two counts of first-degree murder.

The lethal injection extended Florida's record for total executions in a single year, with the state planning to carry out two more executions later this month and next.

Court records indicate Smithers met Christy Cowan and Denise Roach on different dates in May 1996 at a Tampa motel to pay them for sex. At the time, he was doing landscape maintenance

on a 27-acre property that included three ponds in rural Plant City, Fla.

On May 28, 1996, the property owner — who had met Smithers in church where he was a Baptist deacon — stopped by to find Smithers cleaning an ax in the carport, which he claimed to be using to trim tree limbs. The property owner noticed a pool of blood in the carport, according to court records.

The woman contacted law enforcement, and a sheriff's deputy met her later that day at the property. The blood had been cleaned up, but the deputy noticed drag marks leading to one of the ponds, according to court records. That's where authorities found the bodies of Cowan and Roach. Both women had been beaten, strangled and left in the pond to die.

## Federal adviser charged over classified records

**DC** WASHINGTON — A senior adviser at the State Department and expert on Indian and South Asian Affairs is accused by the Justice Department of printing out classified documents and storing more than 1,000 pages of highly sensitive government records in filing cabinets and trash bags at home.

Ashley Tellis, who has also worked as a contractor in the Defense Department's Office of Net Assessment, was charged in federal court in Virginia with the unlawful retention of national defense information after FBI agents who searched his home over the weekend found what they said was a trove of records marked as classified at the secret and top secret levels.

He was ordered detained

Tuesday pending a detention hearing next week.

An FBI affidavit cites several instances over the last month in which Tellis is alleged to have printed on government computers, or asked a colleague to print, classified documents on topics including U.S. military aircraft capabilities. Surveillance video shows him on several occasions exiting the State Department and a Defense Department facility with a briefcase in which he was believed to have stashed the printed-out papers, according to court documents.

## Court backs school in 'Let's Go Brandon' ban

**MI** SAND LAKE — A federal appeals court on Tuesday ruled in favor of a Michigan school district in a dispute over free speech and "Let's Go Brandon" shirts, clothing that took a jab at then-President Joe Biden.

The mother of two boys, who got the shirts as Christmas gifts, said her sons' First Amendment rights were violated when they were told to take off the shirts at Tri County Middle School in 2022. The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals disagreed in 2-1 opinion.

"In the schoolhouse, vulgarity trumps politics. And the protection for political speech doesn't give a student carte blanche to use vulgarity at school — even when that vulgarity is cloaked in innuendo or euphemism," said judges John Nalbandian and Karen Nelson Moore.

In 2021, an obscenity directed at Biden was being chanted at a NASCAR race, though a TV sports reporter said it was

"Let's Go, Brandon." The line suddenly became popular among Biden's conservative critics.

## Prosecutor says murder suspect tried to steal

**NY** NEW YORK — The New York City man charged with killing an elderly couple and then setting their house on fire during a horrific home invasion last month had also attempted to drain their bank accounts before using their credit cards to go on a shopping spree, prosecutors said Tuesday.

Jamel McGriff, a serial robbery suspect on parole, pleaded not guilty Tuesday to multiple counts of murder, kidnapping and arson, according to Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz's office.

The 42-year-old Bronx resident is charged in the Sept. 8 killings of Frank Olton, 76, and Maureen Olton, 77, in their home in the New York City borough of Queens.

Prosecutors say McGriff had been going door-to-door asking residents if he could come in to charge his cellphone. They say he spoke with Frank Olton, who had offered to help, before McGriff forced his way into the couple's home.

Firefighters responding to a report of a house fire found Frank Olton's body in the basement tied to a pole and with multiple stab wounds to his neck and chest. Maureen Olton's badly burned body was found in the living room.

Prosecutors said McGriff unsuccessfully attempted to transfer more than \$10,000 from the couple's accounts to his own.

— From wire reports

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# Blue Jays' bats come alive to rout Mariners

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Tired in Toronto, the Blue Jays slugged in Seattle.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and George Springer woke up Toronto as the Blue Jays hit five home runs to rebound from an early deficit, routing the Mariners 13-4 Wednesday night and closing to 2-1 in the AL Championship Series.

Toronto had 18 hits — all within the first three pitches of each at-bat.

"If they give us a first pitch, the pitch that we're looking for, we're going to attack and we're going to be aggressive," Guerrero said.

Seattle starter George Kirby gave up eight of the hits.

"I wasn't really executing when they got the guys on base," Kirby said. "And they're really aggressive when that happens. They made some good swings."

Julio Rodríguez's two-run, first-inning homer off former Cy

Young Award winner Shane Bieber put the Mariners ahead and stirred thoughts of a possible sweep in the best-of-seven matchup by a team seeking its first World Series appearance.

Andrés Giménez then sparked the comeback with a tying, two-run homer in a five-run third against Kirby.

Springer, Guerrero, Alejandro Kirk and Addison Barger also went deep as the Blue Jays totaled 2,004 feet of homers.

Guerrero had four hits, falling a triple short of the cycle, after going 0 for 7 as Toronto lost the first two games at home.

"No one expected us to win the division, no one expected us to be here, and I think the guys take that to heart," Blue Jays manager John Schneider said. "I said it when we left Toronto: I hope we find some slug in the air out here. Maybe we did."

In the 2-3-2 format, teams that lost the first two games at home and won Game 3 on the road

have captured the series three of 11 times.

A crowd of 46,471 at T-Mobile Park for Seattle's first home ALCS game since 2001 saw the teams combine to match the postseason record of eight combined home runs, set by the Chicago Cubs and St. Louis Cardinals in Game 3 of the 2015 NL Division Series and matched by the Los Angeles Dodgers and Houston Astros in Game 2 of the 2017 World Series.

Giménez hadn't homered since Aug. 27 before his drive off a Kirby fastball.

"Definitely something changed for our offense," Giménez said. "We come tonight with a mentality to attack."

Kirby allowed eight runs, eight hits and two walks, taking the loss.

"The first couple innings I thought he was dynamite," Mariners manager Dan Wilson said. "This is a team that's going to hurt you if you make mistakes on

the plate. It looked like there were a couple that they were able to get to."

Kirby's run-scoring wild pitch put the Blue Jays ahead 3-2 and Daulton Varsho followed with a two-run double.

Springer homered in the fourth, tying Bernie Williams for fourth on the career list with his 22nd postseason homer. Guerrero hit his fourth of the postseason for a 7-2 lead on the first pitch of the fifth.

Kirk added a three-run homer in the sixth and is hitting .413 (19 for 46) with eight RBIs in 14 games at T-Mobile Park.

Bieber, who got the win, pitched shutout ball after the first and wound up allowing four hits in six innings — the longest outing by a Toronto starter in seven postseason games.

"Obviously didn't start the way he would have wanted to, but that's pretty much who he is," Springer said. "He can battle back from anything."

## Talbot makes 21 saves as Red Wings beat Panthers

Associated Press

DETROIT — Cam Talbot made 21 saves, Mason Appleton scored twice and Detroit beat Florida 4-1 on Wednesday night to send the defending champion Panthers to their second straight loss.

Injury-hit Florida began the season with home victories over Chicago, Philadelphia and Ottawa, then lost at the Flyers on Monday.

The Red Wings have won three in a row. They opened with a home loss to Montreal, then swept a home-and-home series with Toronto.

Appleton opened the scoring at 2:09 of the second on a snap shot. Patrick Kane added a power-play goal at 9:36, firing a shot from right side to the near top corner. Appleton put it away into an empty net with 1:58 left, and Michael Rasmussen also had an empty-netter.

**Sabres 8, Senators 4:** Jack Quinn gave Buffalo the lead for the first time this season with a shot that missed the net and still went in, and the host Sabres had two more power-play scores and a short-handed goal

to beat Ottawa for their first victory.

Quinn got it started midway through the first period on a man advantage, firing a one-timer from the slot that sailed just right and over the net, bounced off the glass and fluttered in off goalie Leevi Merilainen's back. Quinn also scored in the third period.

Buffalo broke through after being outscored 10-2 in losing three straight to open the season — falling 4-0 at home to the New York Rangers and 3-1 at Boston and at home against Colorado. They have never opened 0-4.

Jason Zucker scored two power-play goals in a 1:57 span in the Sabres' four-goal second period. Ryan McLeod scored short-handed and Alex Tuch had an even-strength goal in the second. McLeod added a goal in the third, and Jiri Kulich had an empty-netter.

**Mammoth 3, Flames 1:** JJ Peterka and Barrett Hayton scored second-period goals, Karel Vejmelka made 19 saves and host Utah beat Calgary.

The Mammoth became the sixth NHL

franchise to win each of their first two home openers. They also earned their fourth straight win over the Flames after going 3-0 against them last season.

Kevin Stenlund added an unassisted empty-net goal with 22.2 seconds remaining to complete the scoring for Utah.

Calgary has surrendered 19 goals through its first five games and has a minus-9 goal differential — second-worst in the NHL. Devin Cooley made his season debut for the Flames and finished with 29 saves.

**Blackhawks 8, Blues 3:** Lukas Reichel had two goals and an assist, and visiting Chicago pounded St. Louis for its second straight win.

Connor Bedard had three assists for the Blackhawks, who beat Utah 3-1 on Monday for their first victory of the season. Ilya Mikheyev had a goal and an assist.

Chicago played without captain Nick Foligno, who is taking a leave of absence because his 12-year-old daughter is having follow-up surgery related to her congenital heart disease.



# Chiefs' offense boosted with Rice's return

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Kansas City Chiefs will finally get to see what their offense looks like when Rashee Rice joins fellow wide receivers Xavier Worthy and Marquise Brown on the field for Sunday's game against the Las Vegas Raiders.

Rice returned to practice Wednesday after his six-game suspension for violating the NFL's personal conduct policy, a punishment that was handed down for causing a high-speed wreck on a Dallas highway in March 2024 that injured several people.

He rejoins an offense that just scored 30 points on the Detroit Lions last week and is starting to find its swagger again.

"He's going to want to be out there every single play. That's the mentality he has," Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes said. "It's going to be our job as coaches and teammates to build him back the right way, but it's going to be hard to keep him off the field."

That's a good problem given

how long the Chiefs have waited to get their top three wide receivers on the field together.

It was the vision of Kansas City general manager Brett Veach and coach Andy Reid going back more than a year, when they signed Brown in free agency and drafted Worthy in the first round. But the plan went amiss almost from the start when Brown hurt his shoulder on the first play of preseason — last preseason — and it kept him out until December.

By that time, Rice had torn ligaments in his knee, sidelining him the rest of the season. The freak injury occurred when Mahomes threw an interception and was trying to make a tackle and instead collided with his wide receiver's right knee. After undergoing surgery, Rice managed to get back on the field for the Chiefs' offseason program, and he was able to take part in training camp. But then the NFL handed down its suspension, keeping him away from the team for the first six weeks.

All three of the wide receivers

are now healthy and available, and it seems the biggest question is whether there are enough opportunities to go around. Kansas City has also gotten good production from JuJu Smith-Schuster, and tight end Travis Kelce has had a resurgent season after spending the past eight months getting into better shape.

"I feel like everybody in this offense can make a play or go win one on one. It's another explosive guy," Worthy added.

Rice brings a different look to the offense than Brown or Worthy. He has the size and physicality to catch passes near the line of scrimmage and make yards after contact. It's a similar set of skills to Smith-Schuster, though Rice is younger and faster.

"Listen, I think he's excited to be back in and going," said Chiefs coach Andy Reid, who declined to say whether he'd have any snap count on Rice in his first game back. "You know, I think getting through practices here will be good for him to get back in the swing of things. We'll see how everything goes from there. He's

been working hard. He's in good shape."

While Kansas City expects to have its full complement of wide receivers, it could be without left tackle Josh Simmons for the second consecutive game. He was a late scratch from last week's win over Detroit with what the team called "personal reasons," and Reid declined to address his status when asked about it multiple times Wednesday.

Simmons' absence means Jaylon Moore is expected to start again at left tackle. He signed a two-year, \$30 million deal in free agency with the expectation of starting before the Chiefs drafted Simmons in the first round. Now he is getting his chance.

"He's a competitive kid," Reid said. "He did come here to step in, and he's always ready. He practices a third of the practices because (offensive line coach) Andy (Heck) rotates him in there. I thought he did a nice job the other night. He played well. We have a lot of trust in him. Most of all, the guys around him have a lot of trust in him."

## Jaguars want WR Hunter more involved on offense

Associated Press

The Jacksonville Jaguars have a plan that could reduce Brian Thomas Jr.'s drops: throw more to two-way rookie Travis Hunter.

Coach Liam Coen said Wednesday the Jaguars (4-2) would like to get Hunter more involved beginning Sunday against the Los Angeles Rams (4-2) at Wembley Stadium in London.

"Our job as an offensive staff is to make sure we're putting him in the progression and putting him in the position to be (target) No. 1 a little bit more often in some ways," Coen said.

Jacksonville's passing attack was designed to play through Thomas, who caught 87 passes for 1,282 yards and 10 touch-

downs as a rookie last season. But the former LSU standout has dropped six passes this season and short-armed at least three more attempts thrown over the middle.

Hunter, meanwhile, has played primarily in the slot in three-receiver sets. The 2024 Heisman Trophy winner from Colorado, the second overall draft pick in the NFL draft, has a knack for making tough catches and making defenders miss when he has the ball in his hands.

"I've just got to continue to be consistent for the quarterback and for the coaches so they can trust me more," said Hunter, who is making his first visit to London.

He has 20 receptions for 197

yards while playing 63% of the team's offensive snaps. He made a leaping catch between two defenders against Kansas City and an equally impressive one against Houston two weeks earlier. He was targeted twice more on plays that looked as if they would be touchdowns before defenders turned them into interceptions.

"When he is the primary, we've got to throw and catch," Coen said. "We've got to make sure that we identify it, find him, be able to be at the right spot at the right time. ... I think it's a combination of a lot of those things that ultimately can all be controlled."

Finding the right usage for Hunter has been a challenge all season, especially with him

splitting time between offense and defense.

But the Jaguars agree that getting him more chances on offense is a much-needed next step.

"Sometimes we might not give him as many touches as we wanted to or we planned to, and the game just unfolds a little bit differently," quarterback Trevor Lawrence said. "That's just football."

"But it's definitely something that we are consistently trying to do because I think we've all seen how special he is when he gets the opportunities downfield or just catches the ball underneath and can make people miss and turn those 5-yard passes into 25-yard gains because he's so good with the ball in his hands."

# Louisville brings top defense to Miami

*Associated Press*

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Louisville has a long history of high-powered offense. Coach Jeff Brohm has a much more balanced group of Cardinals these days.

Sure, Louisville can still light up the scoreboard in Brohm's third season at his alma mater. While the Cardinals have averaged 36 points per game this season, it's their defense that has led the way and helped pull out victories when the offense has struggled.

Louisville's defense is holding opponents to just 262 yards per game. That's stingiest in the Atlantic Coast Conference and 12th nationally, just ahead of No. 2 Miami, which ranks second in the league and 16th in the country giving up 276.4 yards a game.

Both defenses will be on display Friday night when the Cardinals (4-1, 1-1) visit the Hurricanes (5-0, 1-0).

"They have done just an excellent job forcing negative plays,

disrupting the schedule of the offense," Miami coach Mario Cristobal said about Louisville's defense. "They just play really hard, really fast. They communicate really well."

Although the Cardinals have played some Football Championship Subdivision and lower-tier Football Bowl Subdivision programs, their defense has shown their ability against two of the conference's better offenses.

In an overtime loss to Virginia on Oct. 4, Louisville held the Cavaliers to 237 yards — more than 300 fewer than what they were averaging coming into the game. At Pittsburgh, the Cardinals forced five turnovers with three second-half interceptions as they shut out the Panthers after halftime to rally to a 34-27 win after trailing by 17.

A big key to transforming a defense ranked 64th last season giving up 368.7 yards a game into one of the nation's best this season has been senior linebacker TJ Quinn. He's one of the four

returning starters from last season.

Quinn ranks second on the team with 31 tackles and is tied for the lead with two interceptions. Off the field, Quinn likes to watch the "Fast & Furious" movies, words that can also be used to describe Louisville's defense.

Both of Quinn's picks came against Pittsburgh, earning him ACC Linebacker of the Week honors for a second time this season. Quinn's value goes beyond just his production.

A fifth-year player who has started all 32 games under Brohm, Quinn came into 2025 as the leading tackler the past two seasons. He also serves as "the quarterback on defense," according to Brohm, who said Quinn has handled the role well.

"When we know exactly what to do, when we're all on the same page ... I think he's the one who controls that and has to be the vocal leader," Brohm added.

That leadership has also extended to integrating players

from the transfer portal, a key resource for Brohm's roster building.

Kalib Perry, a senior linebacker who transferred to Louisville after three seasons at Tennessee, said Quinn's vocal leadership has been crucial.

"I know that's been an area for him, to be able to communicate with the defense," Perry said. "Not just on the field, but off the field, whatever we're trying to accomplish. He's been a huge part, not only in the linebacker room, but just the heart of our defense as well."

Even with the loss to Virginia, the Cardinals continue working to reach the ACC championship game in Charlotte, N.C., in December. If that happens, credit will likely go to their defense.

Quinn believes their best performance has yet to come.

"Me personally, I just want this team to continue to get better every week," he said. "Hopefully by the end of the season, we've played our best ball."

## No. 13 Notre Dame confident in OL with Otting filling in at C

*Associated Press*

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — No. 13 Notre Dame has seen its offense grow up quickly with redshirt freshman quarterback C.J. Carr at the controls, but a switch in the player snapping the ball to him will literally be the center of attention for the Fighting Irish when they host No. 20 USC on Saturday.

Ashton Craig, one of the top centers in the nation, suffered a season-ending right knee injury in Notre Dame's 36-7 victory against N.C. State.

Sophomore Joe Otting will start at center for the Fighting Irish (4-2), who rack up 40 points a game (14th in the nation) and average 465.5 yards a game total offense (No. 21 in the nation).

Craig also suffered an injury last season and Pat Coogan stepped in, playing a key role in

Notre Dame's run to the national championship game. Coogan is suiting up for No. 3 Indiana now, transferring after the 2024 season.

Otting will be surrounded by plenty of experience. Left guard Billy Schrauth, right tackle Aamil Wagner and left tackle Anthonie Knapp were all key to the Irish playoff run last season. Cam Herron and Chris Terek are listed as back-ups at center, and Knapp has limited experience at the position.

Craig's injury happened on a touchdown pass that pushed Notre Dame to a 24-7 lead late in the third quarter. Otting helped Notre Dame reach the end zone again, handling the center duties on a 10-play, 72-yard drive.

Carr has been prolific thanks to the protection of the line. He has passed for 1,622 yards and 13

touchdowns and is second in the nation in passing yards per completion (15.45), third in yards per pass attempt (10.27) and seventh in passing efficiency (176.0).

Notre Dame's 1-2 punch of Jeremiyah Love and Jadarian Price has benefited from a line that has made the Fighting Irish the only FBS team with two running backs who have gained more than 420 yards this season. Love has run for 530 yards and eight TDs, Price for 422 yards and seven TDs.

Enter Otting, a 6-foot-4, 308-pounder, who will be expected to help the Fighting Irish continue the productivity against USC (5-1).

"Otting has been practicing well and in his opportunities up to this game, has done a really good job," Notre Dame coach Marcus Freeman said. "I proba-

bly had more confidence watching and evaluating this last game, when he had to step up and go in there and get his job done. And he did a really good job. So there's a lot of confidence in Joe Otting."

Schrauth said the switch to Otting at center in the N.C. State game was seamless.

"He did well," Schrauth said of Otting. "He didn't blink an eye. That's kind of his, his personality. He's kind of a cool cat."

Craig will help Otting prepare for Saturday's showdown with USC.

"(Ashton Craig) loves Notre Dame," Schrauth said. "He loves Notre Dame a ton. He'll continue to prepare. He'll prepare like he's out there. He'll help (Otting) get ready. He's special in that way and he'll take a lot of pride in it."