

# STARS AND STRIPES®

Thursday, September 12, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## USMC family awarded \$2M in mold lawsuit

By ROSE L. THAYER

*Stars and Stripes*

A Marine Corps family that sued a management company over health problems that they claimed were caused by mold in their military housing unit was awarded \$2 million by a San Diego jury, the family's attorney confirmed Wednesday.

Staff Sgt. Matthew Charvat, his wife Leigh Charvat and their two children filed the lawsuit in January 2018 alleging negligence, emotional distress, wrongful eviction and breach of their rental agreement against Lincoln Military Housing and San Diego Family Housing. Charvat, then working at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, filed the initial complaint in San Diego County, which outlined conditions in the home that included mold in the air vents, crumbling drywall, a "horrible, musty odor throughout" the house and a damaged roof.

In Lincoln Military Housing's response, the company said they responded accordingly to the Charvat's maintenance requests and the mold was not found to the degree

alleged by the family in the lawsuit.

"[Lincoln Military Housing] will appeal this unjust ruling on the law and the merits because the allegations in the case are refuted by the facts," according to a statement released by the property management company, which has military housing offices in 11 states and Washington, D.C. "There were never any reports of mold in this property from previous tenants, and both LMH and these residents certified there was no mold when they moved in. These residents also reported no mold for 9 of the 11 months they lived in the home."

If Lincoln files an appeal, the Charvats will not receive any money until it's complete, said Matt Poelstra, the family's attorney.

Each member of the Charvat family was awarded \$500,000 for pain and suffering in the jury's decision last week, Poelstra said. An additional \$45,000 was awarded for medical bills and other expenses. The family has since moved to Fort Dix, N.J., but they traveled back to California for the duration of the trial, which ended Sept. 5.

"In my gut, it doesn't feel right that ser-

vicemembers have to go to such lengths to just have adequate housing," Poelstra said. "We're not talking about mansions, we're talking about houses that don't have mold and don't make you sick."

The Charvats lived in a three-story, three-bedroom townhouse in Gateway Village from April 27, 2015, until April 7, 2016, according to court documents. At the time, their children were 3 and 6 years old. The first doctor visit was 22 days after they moved into the home, Poelstra said.

After months of medical appointments for all members of the family for symptoms including coughs, fatigue, flu-like symptoms and sneezing, mold was discovered in February 2016. The complaint states the repairs were inadequate and the family moved out about two months later.

The Pentagon has worked to forge better relationships with landlord companies and to establish new guidelines meant to empower the tenants of military housing to hold those companies accountable when they do not provide adequate living conditions.

## US airstrikes accelerated during talks with Taliban

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN  
AND J.P. LAWRENCE

*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — As U.S. and Taliban officials talked peace, the U.S. military was accelerating airstrikes in Afghanistan, with the biggest monthly tally of the year carried out in August as the negotiations were in their final stage, a new report shows.

President Donald Trump canceled a planned Camp David meeting with the Taliban last weekend and declared the 10-month negotiations were "dead." He cited the Sept. 5 suicide car bombing that killed an American soldier and 11 other people in Kabul.

"When the Taliban tried to gain negotiating advantage by conducting terror attacks inside of the country, President Trump made the right decision to say that's not going to work," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Sunday in explaining why the

peace talks were scrubbed.

Throughout the negotiations, however, the U.S.-led coalition and their Afghan partners have sought to use battlefield pressure to push the Taliban into a settlement to end America's nearly 18-year war.

A coalition report released Tuesday showed that U.S. forces carried out 810 airstrikes in August, compared with 537 in July. About 700 airstrikes were carried out in May, which the Bureau of Investigative Journalism had said was the year's highest monthly total based on data from the U.S. military.

The data does not specify targets but does include general locations, most of which appear to be in Taliban-held areas.

Between May 10 and Aug. 8, U.S. and Afghan airstrikes increased nearly 60% compared with the same period in 2018, according to a U.N. report published last week.

In recent days, the U.S. "has hit our

enemy harder than they have ever been hit before, and that will continue," Trump said Wednesday during a Pentagon ceremony to mark the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the U.S. Those attacks spurred America's invasion of Afghanistan to topple the Taliban government that refused to hand over al-Qaida founder Osama bin Laden and other terrorists responsible for the attacks.

Data wasn't immediately available to support Trump's claim.

A Pentagon report to Congress in July touted efforts to synchronize and increase U.S. and Afghan operations to "put heavy pressure on the Taliban" and "provide strong incentives for them to engage in meaningful negotiations."

The intensified operations have pushed battlefield casualties to unprecedented levels, analysts said. Sweden's Uppsala University Department of Peace and Conflict Research program recorded 14,000 battle-related deaths during the first half of the year.

## Options limited for fast care of injured in Africa

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTT GART, Germany — Cutting alert times for rescue aircraft and mobile surgical teams could boost survival rates for U.S. military personnel deployed to remote locations in Africa, where low-quality hospitals and long travel times pose a risk for troops, a new study said.

The study, by Rand Corp., a nonprofit think tank that contracts with the Defense Department, looked at the challenges facing U.S. Africa Command when it comes to providing trauma care. It recommended reducing aircraft alert times from three hours to one or less, and making it possible for surgical teams to travel to patients.

Currently, AFRICOM's evacuation plan calls for every servicemember to receive emergency surgery no later than six hours after injury. That timeline is reduced during higher risk missions, said AFRICOM spokeswoman Samantha Reho.

In the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the standard was for casualties to reach a trauma center within 60 minutes or less — the so-called “golden hour.” That has been credited with saving scores of lives at

the height of the conflicts.

In Africa, however, such a standard is virtually impossible to achieve.

Even if all the assets deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan were simultaneously deployed to Africa, “AFRICOM would still not be able to achieve rapid rescue times,” the study said.

The difficulties are compounded by a lack of quality hospitals in African countries. In rating health care capabilities, Rand concluded there were no “good” or “excellent” options anywhere in Africa.

And while there were 32 host-nation hospitals in 15 different countries capable of surgical care, risks of trauma patients receiving blood infected with HIV, Hepatitis C or other potentially deadly viruses was 4.6% — or roughly one out of every 22 trauma patients treated, Rand found.

Blood safety hazards make it unacceptable to incorporate host-nation hospitals as part of strategy for force planning purposes, it said.

“But there is still the possibility of utilizing host-nation hospitals when no other trauma care option is available. In such *in extremis* situations, the risk of contaminated blood may be less than the risk of delaying medical care,” the report said.

## Merz takes reins as 7th Fleet keeps up its ‘hard work’

By SETH ROBSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Hard work following a “tragic” 2017 meant the U.S. 7th Fleet started 2019 “fully prepared” to fight and win, outgoing commander Vice Adm. Phillip Sawyer told sailors during a change-of-command ceremony Thursday at Yokosuka.

Sawyer, who passed command to Vice Adm. Bill Merz, a fellow submariner with experience in Japan, had guided the fleet since August 2017 in the aftermath of two separate collisions involving U.S. warships and commercial vessels that killed 17 sailors. The collisions in summer 2017 involving the guided-missile destroyers USS Fitzgerald and the USS John S. McCain resulted in the ouster of Sawyer's predecessor, Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin. They also sparked a Navy effort to prevent future incidents by implementing about 100 changes such as tightening surface warfare officer qualifications and

improving watch standing.

After the tragedies, “2018 was a rebuilding year and we made many changes,” Sawyer said. “It was really hard work, but we entered 2019 fully prepared.”

Merz understands what's going on “against the number one adversary in the number one theater,” U.S. Pacific Fleet commander Adm. John Aquilino said. Although Aquilino didn't elaborate, the “number one” adversary in the Pacific recently is China, whose bid to increase its sphere of influence has also put the 7th Fleet to work. U.S. warships periodically conduct freedom-of-navigation operations in areas of the South and East China Seas claimed by several nations, including, and in some cases occupied by, China.

Merz, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, comes from the Pentagon, where he served as deputy chief of naval operations for warfare systems, according to his official biography.

## Report: US F-15s came close to hitting parachutists in UK

By CHRISTOPHER DENNIS  
*Stars and Stripes*

LAKENHEATH, England — A routine training flight was anything but when two U.S. fighter jets came close to colliding with a pair of parachutists over southern England earlier this year, a report by a British air safety board says.

One of the skydivers, outfitted with a helmet-mounted camera, filmed two F-15s passing under them above Cambridgeshire, said a report by

British air safety board UK Airprox, released in July.

The two F-15s, from RAF Lakenheath, were on a training flight when the near-miss occurred in April, 48th Fighter Wing spokeswoman Sybil Taunton said.

They had just been handed off by air traffic controllers at RAF Coningsby to those at RAF Lakenheath when the incident happened, said the report.

The pilot of the lead F-15 told Airprox he had changed course after the handover to avoid a

KC-135 refueling tanker that “was on a collision course with the formation,” and inadvertently ended up over Chatteris airfield, which is popular with skydivers.

The pilot said he “was not aware that Chatteris were active and this was not mentioned by air traffic control,” the report said.

The parachutists were falling at 120 mph, they told Airprox. The two F-15s were traveling at nearly three times that speed — 345 mph — and the pilots

said they did not see the skydivers, the report said.

RAF Lakenheath is “using this incident to reinforce the vital importance of situational awareness and attention to detail for all of our air traffic controllers and aircrew,” said Col. Will Marshall, 48th Fighter Wing commander.

“U.K. airspace is incredibly complex and often congested, and the safety of our aircrew as well as those we share the skies with is our number one priority,” he said.

# Book about Mattis cleared for release

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — A forthcoming book about former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis' tenure at the Pentagon has been released from a security review and can be published, days after its author filed suit alleging that the Defense Department was blocking its publication.

Retired Navy Cmdr. Guy Snodgrass, who served as a speechwriter for Mattis for 17 months and retired in August 2018, wrote "Holding the Line: Inside Trump's Pentagon with Secretary Mattis," and publisher Penguin Random House has billed it as an "insider's sometimes shocking account" of how Mattis operated as Pentagon chief "while serving as

a crucial check on the Trump Administration."

The book has languished in a standard prepublication review for many months, as Pentagon officials scrutinized a manuscript to make sure it did not contain classified information. Snodgrass and his attorney, Mark Zaid, had alleged that some Defense Department officials had threatened to reduce his rank in retirement and that the officials claim that his obligations stretched beyond safeguarding classified information to other sensitive but legal areas.

The Pentagon shifted gears on Wednesday.

In a new letter provided to *The Washington Post*, George R. Sturgis Jr., chief of the De-

fense Office of Prepublication and Security Review, informed Snodgrass that his book was cleared, with some amendments to three chapters. The Pentagon confirmed the letter was legitimate, but otherwise declined to comment.

Zaid said that reviewers ultimately struck a few sentences from the book, "changed a few words" and included reasonable requests to redact "probably not classified" but sensitive information, such as the hotels where travel delegations stayed.

"With this victorious approval, the publisher is going to make every possible effort to publish the book by the original intended date," Zaid said. "This is the power of litigation."

The news of the book being

cleared was first reported by *Mother Jones*.

Snodgrass had said in an affidavit filed in the case that his original publication date was Oct. 29 but that the delays would prevent that.

He also alleged that he reached out to Mattis to inform him about the book in March, about three months after the Pentagon chief resigned from his job while citing differences with Trump. Mattis responded in an email that he regretted Snodgrass appeared "to be violating the trust that permitted you as a member of my staff to be in private meetings in my office, where those of us carrying the responsibilities believed that all could speak openly in pre-decisional discussions."

## Creator of 'Storm Area 51' pulls out of Nevada event

*The Washington Post*

When the college student behind the online sensation "Storm Area 51" announced plans for an alien festival out in the Nevada desert, organizers tried to fend off worries that thousands of people would overwhelm the resources of a tiny town without a store or gas station.

Or, as they put it to *The Washington Post*: This is not *Fyre Festival 2.0*.

But that was before a public falling-out between organizers made the weird story of the Area 51 craze even weirder, months after the meteoric rise of a joke Facebook event that got more than 2 million to say they'd raid a secretive Air Force base for rumored extraterrestrials. Dueling accusations of dishonesty and sabotage have derailed "Alienstock" — a Woodstock for alien watchers — which creator Matty Roberts promoted as alternative programming to any plans to storm the base on Sept. 20 despite officials' warnings.

With just over a week to go until the event, Roberts and the

host town's website are both comparing Alienstock to the *Fyre Festival*, which was supposed to be held in April and May of 2017 in the Bahamas but became synonymous with "epic failure" and led to a fraud conviction. Roberts has pulled his name and support from the three-day gathering in Rachel, Nev., but the owner of a motel in the town who had signed up as a partner plans to go ahead.

"There's no safety or security that can really be promised," Roberts told *The Post* on Tuesday, calling the event a potential "humanitarian disaster."

For Roberts, it all fell apart unexpectedly. But the town of Rachel — where residents were reportedly less than pleased with the "Storm Area 51" media swarm — has expressed less surprise.

The outcome was "just as we had predicted," the town's website declares in red lettering. Officials in two counties prepared earlier to declare emergencies, unsure how many people might descend on rural Nevada.

## GOP senators back Trump on defense spending bill

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — A Republican-controlled Senate committee approved a Pentagon funding bill on Thursday, rejecting Democratic attempts to cut President Donald Trump's border wall request and his moves to pay for the project without congressional approval.

The Senate Appropriations Committee lined up behind Trump in party-line votes approving an almost \$700 billion funding bill for the Defense Department and a \$49 billion measure for the Energy Department, nuclear weapons programs and water projects.

The votes came amid tensions on the committee, which is responsible for \$1.4 trillion worth of agency funding bills required to fill in the details of this summer's budget and debt deal. That deal reversed cuts that were aimed at the Pentagon and domestic programs while increasing the government's borrowing cap so it would not default on its payments and Treasury notes.

The committee chairman, Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala.,

had hoped to approve two other bills, a \$55 billion foreign aid measure and a \$178 billion health and education funding bill that's the largest domestic spending bill.

But Republicans stood to lose abortion-related votes that would have aligned those measures with companion bills passed by the Democratic-controlled House, so Shelby postponed the votes.

They also were furious about Trump's moves to raid \$3.6 billion in military base construction projects to pay for 11 additional border fence segments totaling 175 miles in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona.

Despite some tensions on the committee, both sides said they would work to keep the bills on track. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., promised the end results will be fair.

"In the end, the Democratic majority in the House should be able to protect what your priorities are," McConnell said, addressing the Democratic side.

# Vape industry pushes back on flavor bans

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Maine — Efforts to ban flavored e-cigarettes and reduce their appeal to youngsters have sputtered under industry pressure in over a half-dozen states this year even as one state, Michigan, moves ahead with its own restrictions and President Donald Trump promises federal ones.

In many cases, the fight by the industry and its lobbyists has focused on leaving the most popular flavors — mint and its close cousin, menthol — alone. But public health experts say that all flavors should be banned, and that menthol can still hook kids on vaping.

The proposal Trump outlined on Wednes-

day, which would supersede any state inaction, includes a ban on mint and menthol, and an industry giant quickly indicated it would capitulate.

“We strongly agree with the need for aggressive category-wide action on flavored products,” read a statement released by Juul Labs Inc. “We will fully comply with the final FDA policy when effective.”

But the fight in state legislatures has been fierce. Lobbyists for the vaping and tobacco industry fought bans on flavors in Hawaii, California, New Mexico, Massachusetts, New York, Maine and Connecticut.

Such bans failed or stalled, even as Michigan’s governor this month ordered emergency rules prohibiting flavored e-cigarettes. New York Democratic Gov.

Andrew Cuomo on Monday expressed a desire to ban flavored e-cigarettes.

Trump’s federal proposal, as it stands, would require no congressional approval, meaning lobbying efforts to defeat it could be less effective than in state legislatures. Juul spent \$1.9 million in the first half of the year to try and sway the White House, Congress and the Food and Drug Administration.

The Vapor Technology Association has reported spending \$78,000 this year in its lobbying fight against California’s proposed flavored e-cigarettes ban, while one of the world’s largest tobacco producers, Altria, reported spending over \$100,000 last fall solely to lobby such legislation. The bills have since stalled.

# House sets guidelines for impeachment probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler says there’s no confusion about what his committee is doing: It’s an impeachment investigation, no matter how you want to phrase it.

Nadler tried to clear up any misconceptions Thursday as the committee approved guidelines for impeachment hearings on President Donald Trump. Some of Nadler’s fellow Democrats — including House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer — have stumbled over how to

explain what they’re doing.

“Some call this process an impeachment inquiry. Some call it an impeachment investigation. There is no legal difference between these terms, and I no longer care to argue about the nomenclature,” Nadler, D-N.Y., said as he opened the meeting. “But let me clear up any remaining doubt: The conduct under investigation poses a threat to our democracy. We have an obligation to respond to this threat. And we are doing so.”

Republicans disagree with

Nadler and they argue that the House has never voted to open an official inquiry. Georgia Rep. Doug Collins, the top Republican on the committee, said the committee “has become a giant Instagram filter ... it’s put in there to look like something, but it’s really not.”

Collins said Democrats are trying to have it both ways.

“My colleagues know very well they don’t have the votes to authorize impeachment proceedings on the House floor, but they want to impeach the president anyway,” Collins

said. “So, they are pretending to initiate impeachment.”

Impeachment has divided Democrats who control the House. Democrats on Nadler’s committee, including some of the most liberal members of the House, have been eager to move forward with the process. But moderates, mostly first-term lawmakers who handed their party the majority in the 2018 election, are concerned about the committee’s drumbeat on impeachment and the attention that comes with that continued action.

# UK government downplays idea of no-deal Brexit chaos

Associated Press

LONDON — The British government insisted Thursday that its forecast of food and medicine shortages, gridlock at ports and riots in the streets after a no-deal Brexit is an avoidable worst-case scenario, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson denied misleading Queen Elizabeth II about his reasons for suspending Parliament just weeks before the country is due to leave the European Union.

In better news for the embattled British leader, a Belfast court rejected claims that the Conservative government’s Brexit strategy should be ruled illegal because it risked undermining Northern Ireland’s

peace process.

Johnson took office in July vowing to get Brexit done on the scheduled Oct. 31 date, even if there is not a divorce deal to smooth the way. But many lawmakers, economists and businesses fear a no-deal Brexit would be economically devastating and are fighting him every step of the way.

This week, Parliament forced the government to publish its official assessment of the impact of leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement.

The six-page classified document, dated Aug. 2, said customs checks meant the number of trucks crossing the main freight route between Calais and Dover would

drop by between 40% and 60% within a day of a no-deal Brexit, with disruptions lasting up to three months. The supply of certain types of fresh foods and essential medicines would decrease, prices would go up and the poor would be hit hardest.

The paper also described major disruptions for travelers between Britain and the EU and uncertainty for U.K. citizens living in Europe, and it said attempts to maintain an open border between Ireland and Northern Ireland would probably fail. It also said a no-deal exit could trigger major protests and even riots.

Johnson insisted the bleak scenario was “not where we intend to end up.”

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Pair found guilty of vandalizing monument

**NC HILLSBOROUGH** — Two people accused of vandalizing a memorial to enslaved and free black workers who built UNC-Chapel Hill have been ordered to pay a fine and perform community service.

The News & Observer of Raleigh reported Ryan Francis Barnett, 31, of Sanford and Nancy Rushton McCorkle, 50, of Newberry, S.C., were found guilty of injury to real property and larceny, both misdemeanors.

An Orange County judge sentenced Barnett and McCorkle to 200 hours of community service, 18 months of unsupervised probation and a \$500 fine.

The two were accused of marking the Unsung Founders Memorial in March with what the school's interim chancellor said was "racist language."

The memorial is in a central plaza that also featured a statue of a Confederate soldier before protesters tore it down in August.

### Police: Woman escapes handcuffs, steals car

**FL HIGH SPRINGS** — Authorities said a woman arrested on stalking allegations slipped out of her handcuffs and fled in a stolen a patrol car.

The Gainesville Sun reported Mary Liane Fritz, 30, was twice arrested Monday.

High Springs police said Fritz followed a woman to the police station, where the woman told officers Fritz was stalking her. Officers said they handcuffed Fritz behind her back and placed her in the back of a patrol car. An arrest report said Fritz escaped the restraints, climbed through the

partition to the front and drove off, crashing through a gate.

Officers used GPS to track the patrol vehicle, and Fritz was taken back into custody on charges including vehicle theft.

Fritz was being held on \$95,000 bond.

### Negative balance costs student a birthday meal

**OH GREEN** — A northeast Ohio school district that denied a student a birthday lunch due to a negative account balance has announced changes to its lunch policy.

WKYC-TV reported 9-year-old Jefferson Sharpnack's hot lunch was taken away from him at Green Primary School last week.

Sharpnack's grandmother Diane Bailey said he was given a cheese sandwich instead.

### District seeks reversal of swimmer's suit DQ

**AK ANCHORAGE** — The Anchorage School District said it will ask the Alaska School Activities Association to reverse the disqualification of a 17-year-old swimmer for wearing a team-issued swimsuit that exposed too much of her buttocks.

The disqualification blocked the Dimond High School swimmer from a heat victory at a meet Friday.

The school district said it will also ask for the decertification of the official who disqualified the girl.

It said it will also suspend its use of the National Federation of State High School Association's "ambiguous" swimsuit coverage rule issued in August that said athletes could be disqualified if their swimsuits did not cover the buttocks.

KTUU-television reported

a competing coach, Lauren Langford of West High School, said the girl was the only swimmer disqualified even though her teammates wore similar suits. She added the swimmer is being punished for her athletic physique and that the cut of most competitive suits isn't in compliance.

### Trailer with \$100K in fossils reported stolen

**CO AURORA** — A trailer containing fossils worth more than \$100,000 has been reported stolen from a parking lot.

KCNC-TV reported the silver-toned trailer was taken Sunday from the Crowne Plaza Convention Center and Hotel lot in Aurora.

Officials said the 20-foot-long trailer contains 13 fossils including at least four valued at more than \$10,000 each.

### Man charged with stabbing dog 7 times

**MO ST. LOUIS** — A man has been charged with stabbing his neighbor's border collie seven times with a pocket knife in an attack that left the dog so severely injured that it was euthanized.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported John Conrad Ross III, 59, was charged Monday in St. Louis County with unlawful use of a weapon and animal abuse.

A couple told police that Ross chased their two dogs Saturday after the dogs ran onto his property. The police report said Ross grabbed one of the dogs, named Teddy, before slamming him to the ground and stabbing him. Afterward, the wife managed to retrieve the bleeding dog.

Court documents said Ross then stared at his neighbors while holding a handgun.

### Safety check planned around Hula Hoop Tree

**IA AMBER** — A county engineer has been tasked with surveying the area around the Hula Hoop Tree, a popular attraction on a county road in eastern Iowa, after liability concerns were raised.

KCRG-TV9 reported that Derek Snead will inspect the site and report to the Jones County Board of Supervisors.

Some local folks say the first hula hoop on the tree was blown there during a storm in 2015, but there are other, competing versions about what happened.

Hundreds of colorful hoops now adorn the dead tree, which has become a quirky landmark that's drawn visitors from around the Midwest and beyond.

Supervisor Lloyd Eaken said he's worried that the tree won't be able to hold up the weight of the hoops for much longer. County Sheriff Greg Graver said the tree's location near Amber makes it an unsafe place for motorists to stop.

### Nearly 300-pound turtle stranded by hurricane

**DE LEWES** — Hurricane Dorian swept through New England over the weekend, forcing a higher than average number of animals ashore and stranding about six loggerhead sea turtles along a Delaware beach.

The Daily Times of Salisbury (Md.) reported only one of the turtles stranded at Lewes Beach was found alive. The Marine Education, Research and Rehabilitation Institute said the female loggerhead estimated to weigh nearly 300 pounds has been taken to the National Aquarium in Baltimore for rehabilitation.

From wire reports

Your objective source for military news  
updated 24/7 from bases  
around the world.  
Now online at [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

STARS AND STRIPES®

# Watkins enjoys breakout game for KC

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Sammy Watkins told anyone who would listen that he was poised for a resurgent season.

The Chiefs wide receiver was healthy for the first time in what seemed like forever. He toiled tirelessly on the practice fields all summer with quarterback Patrick Mahomes. He refined his route running, protected his body and arrived at Week 1 in better shape than ever.

It showed. All of it.

The former fourth overall pick of the Buffalo Bills, who for years has underachieved at best and been considered a bust at worst, dominated the touted Jacksonville defense. Watkins hauled in nine passes for 198 yards and three touchdowns, pacing the Chiefs to a 40-26 rout in last week's opener.

"I know how to practice now and I know what Coach wants out of me," Watkins said. "So if I come out every day at practice and put the work in, I think

hard work and practice lead to great games.

"I've got to continue to just stack that and move forward to the next game."

The next game comes Sunday in Oakland.

The pressure will be on Watkins, too. Not only will he try to replicate his big-play performance against the Jaguars, he'll be counted on to pick up some slack for injured star Tyreek Hill.

Hill fractured his collarbone early on against Jacksonville, and that was a big reason Mahomes kept going back to Watkins all game. But with Hill sidelined for at least a month — and possibly much longer — it falls on the Chiefs' No. 2 receiver to produce like a No. 1 target.

Just as he did last week.

"We've said it all offseason: Sammy, the way he has prepared his body, the way he's practiced. He really understands the offense at a different level than he did last year," Ma-

homes said.

"I mean, the first play that he scored, whatever-yard touchdown that was, he was like the third or fourth read, he made someone miss and he scored. So, just having a better understanding of the full offense lets him play faster and he can see that the offseason is paying off."

For the record, that was a nifty 68-yard scoring strike in which Watkins made Jaguars star Jalen Ramsey look bad. He later hauled in a 49-yard touchdown strike before adding a short TD catch in the fourth quarter to put the finishing touches on the best game of his career.

The yardage was a career best. So was the touchdown total.

In fact, you have to go back to Watkins' days at Clemson to find a similar performance. He caught 16 passes for 227 yards and a pair of touchdowns in the Orange Bowl against Ohio State in January 2014, but even in

college he never had more than two TD catches in any game.

"From the first (catch) on, you saw him break tackles and split seams. There were no indecisions after catches," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said.

"He's big, he's fast and he is strong. We're moving him all over the place and he is smart, so that helps. I think that combination is what contributed to that (performance). We asked him to play that zebra position and he didn't blink at that. He said, 'Put me in and let me go and I will do my thing.' He plays inside and outside."

In Reid's offense, the "zebra" plays inside — essentially as a slot receiver. And while that is often considered a less-coveted or important job, Watkins has flourished given chances in it.

It helps that he is finally healthy. Watkins has dealt with foot injuries for most of his career, along with a concussion two years ago, bruised ribs, strained groins and myriad other maladies.

## Jags interested in Minshew's substance over style

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Receiver Marqise Lee knew nothing about Gardner Minshew when the Jacksonville Jaguars drafted the quarterback in April.

Lee eventually learned a few details from teammates: Minshew bounced around in college, played his final season at Washington State, set a couple of Pac-12 passing records and finished fifth in the Heisman Trophy voting.

Lee also kept hearing about Minshew's look, which included a thick headband and a bushy mustache. Lee didn't think much about it until he saw Minshew in the locker room for the first time.

"The mustache was terrible," Lee recalled. "I'm not going to lie to you."

Minshew's unique appearance has grown on Lee over the

past five months.

"I love him. He looks good with it," Lee said.

Lee and the Jaguars (0-1) believe Minshew will bring more substance than style to the huddle when he makes his first career start Sunday at Houston (0-1).

"If we can talk about (his mustache), then I know he's playing well," coach Doug Marrone said. "If he doesn't play well, then I know we won't be talking about his mustache."

Minshew welcomed the opportunity even though it came amid less-than-ideal circumstances — a broken collarbone for starting quarterback Nick Foles.

"It's just like any other week," Minshew said. "Just trying to be the best I can for the team. The role changes, but the pressure doesn't."

Jacksonville used a sixth-round pick on Minshew, and it

was clear on draft night that Minshew would be Foles' backup this season.

Top executive Tom Coughlin, general manager Dave Caldwell and Marrone gushed about Minshew's passing prowess.

Minshew continued to impress them over the summer and into training camp, so much so that the Jags didn't even consider bringing in a veteran backup after he failed to lead the offense to a touchdown in 30 preseason drives.

And when Foles left the season opener with a broken left clavicle — he will be sidelined at least two months — the Jaguars turned to Minshew with far more fervor than fear.

Minshew shined in college — eventually.

He started at Troy on an academic scholarship in 2014, transferred to Northwest Mississippi Community College for a year and then moved to East

Carolina in 2016. He graduated in December 2017 and planned to walk on at Alabama. But before he finalized playing for the Tide, Washington State coach Mike Leach called and asked Minshew if he wanted to come lead the nation in passing.

Minshew jumped at the chance and ended up throwing for 4,779 yards, with 38 touchdowns and nine interceptions. He set school and conference records for completions (479) and yards while leading the Cougars to 11 wins.

His NFL debut was equally eye-opening. He completed 22 of 25 passes for 275 yards, with two touchdowns and an interception that came off a tipped pass. His completion rate (88 percent) was the highest in league history for any quarterback with at least 15 pass attempts while making his first appearance.

# On the run: Auburn's rush has been MIA

Associated Press

AUBURN, Ala. — Auburn entered the season with six tailbacks listed as co-starters on the depth chart. It was a comforting scenario of runners galore for a team trotting out a freshman quarterback.

The reality has been the eighth-ranked Tigers have relied heavily on JaTarvious Whitlow and the running game has taken some time to pick up steam in the first two games.

That was definitely true against Tulane, when freshman Bo Nix threw 29 passes before halftime — and the runners produced all of 20 yards.

A steady diet of Whitlow runs in the second half — 15 of them, in fact — helped Auburn pull away.

“The first half, we’ve struggled a little bit,” Tigers coach

Gus Malzahn said Tuesday. “Second half, we’ve played really good football. And some of that’s on me, now, too.

“We’ve got to do a better job as far as everything goes in the first half running-game wise. But I think we’re capable of being a good running team. There’s no doubt in my mind that we are. And we’ll get better.”

Despite that second-half success, Whitlow fumbled three times and lost two, losing the ball once on fourth-and-1 and fumbling another time on first-and-goal from the 1. Offensive lineman Marquel Harrell recovered that one.

Backup Kam Martin is averaging 3.1 yards on 14 carries and Shaun Shivers has netted 6 yards on five carries. They should presumably get more chances against heavy under-

dog Kent State on Saturday night.

The running game could be an even bigger factor with top receiver Seth Williams out with a left shoulder injury.

It’s not like Auburn’s rushing numbers are all that bad. The Tigers rank sixth in the Southeastern Conference in rushing yards per game while averaging a modest 4.3 yards.

But that depth hasn’t really shown up. Whitlow already has 47 carries and Nix is the Tigers’ second-leading rusher with 58 yards.

Other options include red-shirt freshman Harold Joiner and freshman D.J. Williams, who Malzahn said has been “banged up.” Both are bigger guys than Martin and Shivers.

Auburn’s string of nine straight seasons with at least one 1,000-yard rusher

ended last season, partly because Whitlow was limited by injuries.

Malzahn, who is back calling offensive plays this season, has always relied heavily on the run — and on his top tailback. Backs like Tre Mason, Kerryon Johnson and Kamryn Pettway — and Whitlow last season — have had heavy workloads and sometimes injury issues.

The Tigers are hoping an offensive line with five senior starters can pave the way to another productive ground game, minus the injuries.

“It’s just a matter of time before that thing really opens up and really explodes because we’ve got five veteran O-linemen that can get the job done, I guarantee it, and running backs that are all playmakers and that can really tote that thing,” wide receiver Sal Canella said.

## California ‘fair play’ bill goes to governor for signature

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Athletes at California colleges could hire agents and sign endorsement deals under a bill the state Legislature sent to the governor Wednesday, setting up a potential confrontation with the NCAA that could jeopardize the athletic futures of powerhouse programs like USC, UCLA and Stanford.

Gov. Gavin Newsom has not said whether he will sign the bill. But the NCAA Board of Governors is already urging him not to, warning that if he does, California colleges and universities would eventually be banned from NCAA competitions because of their “unfair recruiting advantage.”

“It would erase the critical distinction between college and professional athletics,” the Board of Governors said in a letter to Newsom. “These outcomes are untenable and would negatively impact more than 24,000 California student-athletes across three divisions.”

The state Assembly and Senate sent the bill to the governor without a dissenting vote

in what Republican Assemblyman Kevin Kiley said was “a loud and clear message to the NCAA.” Several Republican senators noted they had planned to vote against the bill but changed their minds after listening to the debate and, in some cases, lobbying from their children.

“This is one of those situations where I think we need to blaze the trail,” said Republican Sen. Jeff Stone.

Donald Remy, the NCAA’s chief operating officer and chief legal officer, said their letter to Newsom “is not intended to be a threat at all” but is “a reflection about the way California is going about this.”

The NCAA believes the bill is unconstitutional because it violates the federal Commerce Clause, and would consider challenging the bill in court if it becomes law. But Democratic Sen. Nancy Skinner, who authored the bill, called that “a hollow threat.”

The bill would allow student-athletes to hire agents and be paid for the use of their names, images or likenesses. It would

stop California universities and the NCAA from banning athletes that take money. But it would forbid them from signing endorsement deals that conflict with their school’s existing contracts. If it becomes law, it would take effect Jan. 1, 2023.

The Senate voted 39-0 Wednesday to pass the bill, which has the endorsement of NBA superstar LeBron James, who skipped college and went directly to the NBA before the league changed its rules to require players to be at least one year removed from high school before entering the draft. But the bill could impact James’ 14-year-old son, who is a closely watched basketball prospect in Los Angeles.

The NCAA is the top governing body for college sports. Athletes can get valuable scholarships, but the NCAA has long banned paying athletes to preserve the academic missions of colleges and universities.

But college sports have since morphed into a multibillion-dollar industry, igniting a debate over the fairness of not paying the industry’s most vis-

ible labor force.

Earlier this year, NCAA President Mark Emmert told lawmakers that passing the bill would be premature, noting the NCAA has a committee led by Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith and Big East Commissioner Val Ackerman that is exploring the issue. Their report is due in October.

The NCAA committee has already said it won’t endorse a plan to pay athletes as if they were employees, but the organization could ease limits on endorsement deals for athletes. The NCAA already lets athletes accept money in some instances. Tennis players can accept up to \$10,000 in prize money, and Olympians can accept winnings from their competitions.

In and around California, schools and conferences believe this legislation might not be the best solution.

The Pac-12, which includes USC, UCLA, Stanford and Cal, issued a statement reiterating its previous stance — asking the California Legislature to delay the debate until the NCAA announces formal proposals.

# Rangers snap Rays' streak at 6 games

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Tampa Bay now has the slimmest of possible leads for the AL's top wild-card after a big comeback that was thwarted by some bad baserunning and Rowned Odor's big blast.

Odor hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the seventh, after the Rays had two runners picked off in the top of the inning, and the Rangers held on for a 10-9 win Wednesday night to end Tampa Bay's six-game winning streak.

"We ended some opportunities, some scoring opportunities with probably some overaggressive baserunning," said manager Kevin Cash, whose team earlier had runners caught stealing on unusual plays in consecutive innings.

Tampa Bay (87-60) had its lead over Oakland for the top wild-card spot trimmed to a

half-game after the A's won at Houston. The Rays had won 11 of their previous 12 games. Cleveland trails Tampa Bay by one game.

After their first seven-run first inning at home in 13 years, the Rangers didn't score again until Odor's 25th homer in the seventh. That came off Nick Anderson right after he had replaced Colin Poche (4-5), who had allowed a single and a walk with two outs.

"He shouldn't have ever been in that situation in the first place. Anytime you get two quick outs like that, you've got to finish the inning," said Poche, the sixth of eight Rays pitchers. "It's not fair to him to maybe have to rush to warm up to get ready to come and bail me out of a situation that we shouldn't have been in."

Matt Duffy's two-out RBI single in the first gave the Rays a 2-0 lead. They tied the game

at 7 on Ji-Man Choi's three-run homer in the second, and went ahead 8-7 when Duffy hit a sacrifice fly to deep center with the bases loaded in the fourth.

Rookie right-hander Ian Gibaut (1-0), the fifth Texas pitcher, threw two scoreless innings for his first big league victory. Jose Leclerc worked the ninth for his 12th save in 16 chances despite giving up Choi's second homer of the game that took just over four hours to play.

Duffy was at third base in the second inning when catcher Jose Trevino came out of his crouch, did a fake pump throw to second and got Duffy in a 2-5-1-6 rundown. After Guillermo Heredia drew a leadoff walk in the third, he was picked off when first baseman Ronald Guzman chased him almost all the way to second base before applying the tag.

"We got some free outs when

we needed them, and it obviously helped us win the game," Rangers manager Chris Woodward said.

Then in the decisive seventh, after consecutive walks to start the inning, Trevino got Choi at second, on a play when the runner was initially called safe before a replay challenge. Gibaut then picked off at first speedy pinch-runner Johnny Davis, who made his big league debut after leading the Mexican League with 54 stolen bases.

Tampa Bay began the second inning with three consecutive doubles before Choi's 14th homer made it 7-all.

"That was impressive. Really, really encouraging what we did. We got down, and obviously we were frustrated," Cash said. "We came up short tonight. ... Let's get back on a roll because we've been playing good."

## MLB roundup

# Villar hits record-setting 6,106th homer this season

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Jonathan Villar hit a tiebreaking, record-setting three-run homer in the seventh inning, and the Baltimore Orioles beat the Los Angeles Dodgers 7-3 Wednesday night to end a six-game losing streak.

Villar's drive off Caleb Ferguson (1-2) was the 6,106th in the majors this season, breaking the previous mark of 6,105 in 2017. The milestone shot came on a fastball that Villar sent deep into the left-field seats to snap a 2-2 deadlock.

Pedro Severino added a two-run drive in the eighth.

Having clinched the NL West title on Tuesday night, Dodgers manager Dave Roberts rested starters Joc Pederson and Justin Turner. Starting pitcher Ross Stripling toiled for only three innings before getting the rest of the night off and a

first-inning double by David Freese was Los Angeles' only hit off John Means through the fifth.

Los Angeles finished with six hits, the most notable a two-run drive by A.J. Pollock.

**Padres 4, Cubs 0:** Rookie Chris Paddock pitched six brilliant innings and host San Diego dropped Chicago into a tie with Milwaukee for the second NL wild-card spot.

Manuel Margot homered off San Diegan Cole Hamels and also made a spectacular catch in center field for the Padres.

**Blue Jays 8, Red Sox 0:** Trent Thornton and three others combined on a two-hitter, Teoscar Hernandez and Rowdy Tellez homered, and host Toronto beat Boston.

**Brewers 7, Marlins 5:** Mike Moustakas homered twice, including a tiebreaking, two-run shot in the ninth as Milwaukee won at Miami in its first game

following star outfielder Christian Yelich's season-ending injury.

**Mets 9, Diamondbacks 0:** Todd Frazier and Jeff McNeil each homered twice and surging New York beat visiting Arizona ace Robbie Ray.

**Braves 3, Phillies 1:** Tyler Flowers hit a three-run homer, Dallas Keuchel struck out eight in six innings and NL East-leading Atlanta won at Philadelphia.

**Nationals 6, Twins 2:** Ryan Zimmerman homered and drove in three runs in support of Stephen Strasburg as Washington won at Minnesota for its third win in the last nine games.

**Athletics 5, Astros 3:** Sean Murphy and Marcus Semien homered, hyped pitching prospect Jesus Luzardo looked sharp in his major league debut, and Oakland won at Houston.

**Royals 8, White Sox 6:**

Jorge Soler hit a pair of two-run homers among his career high-matching four hits, leading Kansas City to a win at Chicago.

**Rockies 2, Cardinals 1:** Antonio Senzatela pitched six strong innings for his first win in two months, Ian Desmond hit a go-ahead home run and host Colorado beat St. Louis.

**Indians 4, Angels 3:** Carlos Santana and Francisco Lindor homered, Carlos Carrasco won in relief and Cleveland won at Los Angeles.

**Pirates 6, Giants 3:** Felipe Vazquez earned his 27th save two days after fighting a teammate in the clubhouse and Pittsburgh won at San Francisco.

**Mariners 5, Reds 3:** Rookie Kyle Lewis broke up a no-hitter bid with a home run for the second consecutive game, and host Seattle beat Sonny Gray and Cincinnati.