

Biden defends exit from Afghanistan

BY NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A defiant President Joe Biden on Tuesday defended his decision to leave Afghanistan and bring a nearly 20-year war to an end.

Biden pushed back against critics who have scrutinized his judgment and argued he took missteps that created the chaotic situation in Afghanistan during the past few weeks.

Aiming to silence those critics, Biden contended his choices regarding Afghanistan had been limited by former President Donald Trump's agreement with the Taliban to withdraw U.S. troops. He said he faced two choices: follow the agreement of the previous administration or send in more U.S. troops to escalate the war.

"That was the choice, the real choice, between leaving or escalating," Biden said. "I was not going to extend this forever war, and I was not extending a forever exit."

U.S. withdrawal efforts began May 1 and accelerated Aug. 15, when the Taliban overthrew the Afghanistan government and took control of Kabul, its capital city.

About 160 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members, including 11 Marines, a sailor and soldier, were killed in an attack Thursday at

the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul as evacuations were ongoing. The attack, a suicide bombing, was conducted by the Afghanistan branch of the Islamic State terrorist group. In response, the United States killed two terrorists and injured a third in a drone strike.

Biden, arguing against his skeptics, said there would've been a panicked rush to the airport regardless of whether the evacuations started sooner.

"There is no evacuation from an end of the war that you can run without the kinds of complexities, challenges and threats we've faced," he said.

The military completed its withdrawal from the country Monday, one day ahead of the deadline set by Biden and enforced by the Taliban. The moment marked the first time in 20 years that America didn't have troops in Afghanistan.

In total, the U.S. evacuated more than 120,000 people in the past 18 days, including 5,500 Americans, Biden said.

House Republicans have criticized Biden's handling of the withdrawal, accusing him of leaving Americans behind.

An estimated 100 to 200 U.S. passport holders remain in Afghanistan, according to the

State Department. Most of the Americans remaining are dual citizens who at first wanted to stay in Afghanistan because of family roots, Biden said. He said the State Department would continue to try to extricate Americans and Afghan allies out of the country and work with Afghanistan's neighbors to secure their departure.

"The bottom line is 90% of Americans in Afghanistan who wanted to leave were able to leave," Biden said. "For those remaining Americans, there is no deadline. We remain committed to get them out if they want to get out."

Going forward, Biden vowed to support the Afghan people through diplomacy and humanitarian aid.

Biden explained his decision to withdraw from Afghanistan as critical for emerging threats. He referenced America's competition and tensions with China and the ongoing challenges with Russia.

"There's nothing China or Russia would rather have than the U.S. to be bogged down in another decade in Afghanistan," Biden said. "The fundamental obligation of the president is to defend and protect America, not against the threats of 2001, but against the threats of 2021 and tomorrow."

In Ida's aftermath, no quick relief in sight for Louisiana

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Louisiana residents still reeling from flooding and damage caused by Hurricane Ida scrambled Wednesday for food, gas, water and relief from the sweltering heat as thousands of line workers toiled to restore electricity and officials vowed to set up more sites where people could get free meals and cool off.

There was a glimmer of hope when power company Entergy announced its crews had turned power on for parts of eastern New Orleans, but did not specify how many homes and businesses had lights. Still, power and water outages affected hundreds of thousands of people, many of them with no way to get immediate relief.

"I don't have a car. I don't have no choice

but to stay," said Charles Harris, 58, as he looked for a place to eat Tuesday in a New Orleans neighborhood where Ida snapped utility poles and brought down power lines.

Harris had no access to a generator and said the heat was starting to wear him down. New Orleans and the rest of the region were under a heat advisory, with forecasters saying the high temperatures and humidity could make it feel like 106 degrees Fahrenheit on Wednesday.

New Orleans officials announced seven places around the city where people could get a meal and sit in air conditioning. The city was also using 70 transit buses as cooling sites and was to have drive-thru food, water and ice distribution locations set up Wednesday, Mayor LaToya Cantrell said. Distribution locations were also being set

up in other parts of the state, the governor said.

Ida was the fifth-most powerful storm to strike the United States when it hit Louisiana on Sunday with maximum winds of 150 mph. The hurricane likely caused \$50 billion or more in total damage, Karen Clark of the risk modeling company Karen Clark and Company told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The mayor estimated that about half of New Orleans' population evacuated before Ida struck. Those remaining worked to slowly restore a sense of order. In parts of the city, flags hung from dangling power lines to help drivers avoid them. In one neighborhood, someone decorated the downed lines with strands of tinsel in an echo of Mardi Gras.

Navy announces latest grooming standards

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Sailors can now sport several new hairstyles based on new grooming standards that the Navy announced Tuesday.

The service has officially sanctioned flat-tops, faded and bald hairstyles in addition to the traditional “high and tight” look for male sailors, the Navy said in a statement. Sideburns are also authorized, but not for bald sailors.

Women are now allowed to have “very short hair styles” that show the scalp, but “razor-cut bald styles are not authorized except when prescribed for treating medical conditions.”

“This gives women more options for greater ease on hair care, especially while on deployment when longer styles can be tougher to maintain,” said Rob Carroll, who is in charge of Navy uniform matters. “Female sailors have been asking for this flexibility.”

While some sailors might have donned

these looks already, the new standards spell out what’s accepted to “eliminate inconsistency” and “provide clearer guidance that will facilitate compliance and enforcement,” Carroll said.

The uniform policy updates come after Navy leaders listened to “fleet feedback, uniform group discussions and command-sponsored requests,” Vice Adm. John Nowell, the chief of naval personnel, said Tuesday in a message to the force.

“Navy uniform policy updates directly support Sailor 2025 objectives to attract and retain the very best sailors by finding greater flexibility in our policies and practices, including uniforms,” Nowell said, referencing the Navy’s personnel management modernization program.

In addition to hairstyles, the new standards allow punctuation marks in name tags and tape for sailors whose legal names contain accents. The standards also permit male sailors to wear earrings while on leave or liberty while wearing civilian clothes. In

addition, female sailors can now wear heels up to 3 inches in height, up from 2 and 5/8 inches.

Smartwatches and fitness trackers are also now allowed to be worn as watches, but they “are subject to applicable security regulations” as some contain GPS and other tracking technology, according to the updated uniform policy.

The new standards also laid out acceptable colors for eyeglasses and sunglasses frames. Sailors may now wear silver, gray, black, navy blue, brown, gold or translucent glasses frames. Straps to secure the glasses, however, can only be used “for foreign object debris prevention and safety,” according to the service.

“There are just so many options available today for glasses and we needed to get some standardization of appearance in uniform,” Carroll said. “This change allows for a wide variety of options, ease of compliance and enforcement as well as maintaining a professional military appearance.”

Marine on Okinawa receives high praise for rescue

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Cpl. James Cates said he didn’t have time to think once he heard a fellow Marine’s cries for help while in the water this spring off Oku Beach on the northern tip of Okinawa.

Cates, 24, of Combat Logistics Regiment 3, had extricated himself from a strong rip current while free diving with friends around 9:45 a.m. on April 17. He said he turned to see Sgt. John Carrillo flailing in the surf behind him.

Cates jumped back into the powerful water

surge and rode it out to his friend, who was spiraling farther and farther out to sea. He dragged Carrillo inch by inch back to shore in a 50-minute lifesaving rescue.

“I just wanted to get my buddy out of there,” Cates said Tuesday in his office on Camp Foster. “Instinctually, you just know, ‘This is something I have to do.’ It’s about doing the right thing.”

Cates’ command recently found out about the rescue and is considering a noncombat valor award, but no decision has been made, according to 3rd Marine Logistics Group

spokesman 1st Lt. Jonathan Coronel.

Cates’ commander called him an “excellent Marine” and a “role model” in an email to Stars and Stripes on Monday.

“Cpl. Cates courageously reentered the water at great personal risk to prevent a fellow Marine from being swept out into the ocean,” wrote regimental commander Col. Chris Haar. “His selfless commitment to a fellow Marine were largely unreported, because he is a humble Marine that performed the lifesaving action because it was the right thing to do.”

Ex-Navy officer pleads guilty in wide-spanning scandal

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — A retired Naval officer admitted in federal court in San Diego to sending a Malaysian defense contractor classified ship schedules for the Navy’s 7th Fleet in exchange for more than \$45,000 in bribes, including stays at luxury hotels.

Retired Chief Warrant Officer Robert Gorsuch also admitted Tuesday in court that he set up a secret email account to help the

ship servicing business of Leonard Francis.

Prosecutors said the firm, Singapore-based Glenn Defense Marine Asia and its owner, known by his nickname “Fat Leonard,” bribed Navy officers with fancy gifts, trips and prostitutes to provide classified information in order to beat competitors and overcharge for services.

The scheme cost the Navy about \$35 million.

“Gorsuch essentially sold his honor for a few nights at the Shangri-La,” Acting U.S. Attorney Randy Grossman said.

Gorsuch and his lawyer could not be immediately reached for comment.

The case has resulted in federal criminal charges against 34 Navy officials, defense contractors, including Francis, and the Glenn Defense Marine Asia corporation. So far, 26 of those have pleaded guilty.

Retired officers demand Austin, Milley resign

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A group of retired military officers are calling for the resignations of Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, over their handling of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The conservative group Flag Officers 4 America orchestrated the letter signed by 87 officers that accuses Austin and Milley of failing to recommend “against this dangerous withdrawal in the strongest possible terms” that left 13 U.S. troops dead.

“Conversely, if they did do everything within their ability to persuade the president to not hastily exit the country without ensuring the safety of our citizens and Afghans loyal to America, then they should have resigned in protest as a matter of conscience and pub-

lic statement,” the group wrote in the letter.

Eleven Marines, a sailor and a soldier and scores of Afghans were killed Thursday when an Islamic State suicide bomber detonated an explosive vest and gunmen fired on crowds near a Kabul airport gate where troops were evacuating Americans, Afghans seeking special immigrant visas and others from Afghanistan.

The withdrawal ended in Kabul just before midnight Tuesday local time after U.S. and coalition forces evacuated more than 123,000 people from Afghanistan since late July. Most of those evacuations happened after Aug. 14, when the U.S. increased its forces at the airport to speed operations as the Taliban closed in on the capital.

Among the signatories are retired Vice Adm. John Poin-dexter, who served as former

President Ronald Reagan’s national security adviser, and one retired four-star admiral, Adm. Jerome Johnson.

At least one officer listed as having signed the letter, Marine Corps Brig. Gen. James Mead, is dead, according to his July obituary posted to the Wareham Village Funeral Home and Cremation Services website.

Flag Officers 4 America is the same organization that in May published a letter with 124 retired admirals and generals accusing President Joe Biden of launching “a full-blown assault on our Constitution rights in a dictatorial manner” over his use of executive orders.

In its Monday letter, the group called the withdrawal “disastrous” and “hasty,” claiming the Americans and vulnerable Afghans left in Afghanistan after U.S. forces left Monday are now “de facto

hostages of the Taliban at this time.”

Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday said between 100-200 Americans who want to leave Afghanistan were unable to get to the airport in time for evacuation.

The group of officers further alleged Austin and Milley should resign for other “leadership, training and moral reasons” related to the Pentagon’s focus this year on addressing racism and extremism within the ranks.

“It has become clear that top leaders in our military are placing mandatory emphasis on [politically correct] ‘wokeness’ related training which is extremely divisive and harmful to unit cohesion, readiness and war fighting,” the group said in its letter. “Our military exists to fight and win our nation’s wars and that must be the sole focus of our top military leaders.”

Afghan hunger crisis adds to Taliban’s challenges

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Food stocks in Afghanistan could run out this month, a senior U.N. official warned Wednesday, threatening to add a hunger crisis to the challenges facing the country’s new Taliban rulers as they endeavor to restore stability after decades of war.

About one third of the country’s population of 38 million is facing “emergency” or “crisis” levels of food insecurity, according to Ramiz Alakbarov, the local U.N. humanitarian coordinator. With winter coming and a drought ongoing, more money is needed to feed the population, he said. The U.N.’s World Food Program has brought in food and distributed it to tens of thousands of people in recent weeks. But of the \$1.3 billion needed for aid efforts, only

39% has been received, he said.

“The lean winter season is fast approaching, and without additional funding, food stocks will run out at the end of September,” Alakbarov said.

The Taliban, who seized control of the country ahead of the withdrawal of U.S. forces, must govern a nation that relies heavily on international aid and is in the midst of a worsening economic crisis. Civil servants haven’t been paid in months and the local currency is losing value. Most of Afghanistan’s foreign reserves are held abroad and currently frozen.

While many Afghans fear a return to the Taliban’s brutal rule, they are also concerned that the country’s economic situation holds little opportunity; tens of thousands sought to flee the country in a harrowing airlift.

American still aiming to rescue Afghan dogs, staff

BY PHILIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

An American who founded an animal rescue clinic in Kabul is still in Afghanistan, trying to persuade the Taliban to let her retrieve animals released by the U.S. military and airlift them out of the country with the clinic’s employees.

Charlotte Maxwell-Jones was unable to board a military evacuation flight with the animals or charter a private aircraft before international troops left earlier this week. The U.S. military released the clinic’s animals from their cages in an enclosed area at the Kabul airport that had previously been used by the former Afghan army, Maxwell-Jones and a Pentagon statement said.

Maxwell-Jones founded Kabul Small Animal Rescue in 2018 to

rescue strays, provide veterinary services and help ship animals abroad for adoption. American service members who befriended animals and wanted to bring them home have been among her most steady clientele.

The Tennessee native has vowed to stay until she secures the evacuation of her staff, their family members and up to 250 cats and dogs. Maxwell-Jones said she has had eight charter planes canceled in recent days.

The entire group arrived at the airport together last week, but Taliban guards initially allowed only Maxwell-Jones and the dogs to enter. The employees were told to wait with the cats, she said.

Only nine of the over 125 people associated with the clinic left Afghanistan, she said. The cats returned to the clinic with staff.

Winds push Calif. fire closer to Lake Tahoe

Associated Press

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. — Flames raced across tree-tops and through drought-stricken vegetation as firefighters scrambled Wednesday to keep a growing California wild-fire from reaching a resort city at the southern tip of Lake Tahoe after evacuation orders were expanded to neighboring Nevada.

Thick smoke from the Caldor Fire enveloped the city of South Lake Tahoe, which was all but deserted during a summer week usually bustling with tourists.

The National Weather Service warned that critical weather conditions through Wednesday

could include extremely low humidity, dry fuel and gusts up to 30 mph.

“With those winds, as it ran through the forest it created what’s called an active crown fire run, where the fire actually goes from treetop to treetop,” said Stephen Vollmer, a fire behavior analyst for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

He said embers were being cast up to a mile out in front of the fire, creating new ignition points, including in some parts of the dense forest that haven’t burned since 1940 or before.

The blaze was 3 miles outside of South Lake Tahoe by Tuesday afternoon, Cal Fire Battal-

ion Chief Henry Herrera told KGO-TV.

A day earlier, roughly 22,000 residents jammed the city’s main artery for hours after they were ordered to leave as the fire advanced.

South Lake Tahoe city officials said only a handful of residents defied Monday’s evacuation order. But nearly everyone worried Tuesday about what the fire would do next.

Tom O’Connell and his wife, Linda, awaited the fate of their home while anchored on their sailboat in Ventura Harbor. The two-bedroom they’ve owned for 40 years survived the Angora Fire that destroyed about 250 houses in 2007. They

didn’t know if they’d be lucky again.

“You worry about the things you can have some control over,” O’Connell said. “We have no control over this.”

Pushed by strong winds, the Caldor Fire crossed two major highways and swept down slopes into the Tahoe Basin, where firefighters working in steep terrain were protecting remote cabins.

Cal Fire Division Chief Erich Schwab said some homes burned, but it was too early to know how many.

“The fire burned through there extremely fast, extremely hot. And we did the best that we could,” he said Tuesday night.

Texas 6-week abortion ban starts, with high court mum

Associated Press

A Texas law banning most abortions in the state took effect at midnight, but the Supreme Court has yet to act on an emergency appeal to put the law on hold.

If allowed to remain in force, the law would be the most dramatic restriction on abortion rights in the United States since the high court’s landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision legalized abortion across the country in 1973.

The Texas law, signed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in May, would prohibit abortions once a fetal heartbeat can be detected, usually around six weeks and before most women even know they’re pregnant.

Abortion providers who are asking the Supreme Court to step in said the law would rule out 85% of abortions in Texas and force many clinics to close. Planned Parenthood is among the abortion providers that have stopped scheduling abortions beyond six weeks from conception.

At least 12 other states have enacted bans on abortion early in pregnancy, but all have been blocked from going into effect.

What makes the Texas law different is its unusual enforcement scheme. Rather than have officials responsible for enforcing the law, private citizens are authorized to sue abortion providers and anyone involved in facilitating abortions. Among other situations, that would include anyone who drives a woman to a clinic to get an abortion. Under the law, anyone who successfully sues another person would be entitled to at least \$10,000.

Abortion opponents who wrote the law also made it difficult to challenge the law in court, in part because it’s hard to know whom to sue.

Lawmakers are also moving forward in an ongoing special session in Texas with proposed new restrictions on medication abortion, a method using pills that accounts for roughly 40% of abortions in the U.S.

Oxygen supplies dwindling amid surge of US virus cases

Associated Press

MISSION, Kan. — The COVID-19 surge is stretching oxygen supplies and sending hospitals scrambling for more ventilators, even as there are signs of hope that the spread of the virus is slowing down in pockets of the United States.

In Tulsa, Okla., a hospital called 911 after coming within just a few hours of running out of oxygen because they needed an emergency transfer for a patient on high-flow oxygen. The hospital got a shipment later that day, but the experience was a warning to other hospitals, said Dr. Jeffrey Goodloe, the chief medical officer for the EMS system that serves Tulsa and Oklahoma City.

“If it can happen to one hospital, it can happen to any hospital,” Goodloe said. “There is no, ‘That is happening over there.’ There is here in a heartbeat.”

The oxygen shortages are yet another sign of the toll that the summer COVID-19 resurgence has taken on the nation’s hospital system. A handful of states, including Florida, Oregon, Hawaii,

Mississippi and Louisiana, have set pandemic records for the number of COVID-19 hospitalizations, and many hospitals are dangerously short of staff and intensive care unit beds.

The country is averaging 155,000 new infections a day, but the caseload trajectory has slowed down dramatically from earlier in August.

Florida, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi had slight declines in cases over the last two weeks. Florida has seen a dip in virus admissions in recent days, as have hospitals in Springfield, Mo., an early epicenter of the delta variant-driven surge.

Vaccination numbers are also up, and White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients credited vaccine mandates that have been implemented across the country, including restaurants, workplaces, sports stadiums and schools.

“Importantly, we’ve accelerated the pace of first shots. In August, we got over 14 million. That’s almost 4 million more first shots in August compared to the prior month in July,” he said Tuesday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Cougar kept as illegal pet removed from home

NY NEW YORK — An 80-pound cougar was removed from a New York City apartment where she was being kept illegally as a pet, animal welfare officials said.

The owner of the 11-month-old female cougar surrendered the animal, Kelly Donithan, director of animal disaster response for the Humane Society of the United States, said in a news release.

The cougar, nicknamed Sasha, spent the weekend at the Bronx Zoo receiving veterinary care and is now headed to the Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas, officials said.

The Humane Society coordinated with zoo officials, the state Department of Environmental Conservation and the New York Police Department on the big cat's removal.

Man charged with trying to steal small airplane

HI HILO — A 24-year-old man was arrested and taken to a Hawaii jail on Monday after he allegedly tried to steal a small airplane from an airport, authorities said.

The Hawaii Police Department said the man crashed a vehicle through the fence at Hilo International Airport on the Big Island on Friday. He then parked next to a fixed-winged single engine aircraft, got out and attempted to manually spin the aircraft's propeller, authorities said.

Police said he then approached a Beechcraft King Air C90A aircraft parked on the ramp, entered the cockpit and

started both engines before leaving the plane.

Officers arrested him shortly after an attempted theft in the first degree, criminal property damage in the first degree, unauthorized control of a propelled vehicle and criminal trespassing charges.

Hawaii News Now reported the plane is an air ambulance. Police said the aircraft is worth \$1.5 million.

Man rescued after days trapped at sand dune

OR REEDSPORT — Authorities said a 54-year-old man was rescued from the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area after being stranded for five days.

KOIN reported that the Coos County Sheriff's Office said hikers found the stranded and injured man on the John Dellenback trail. He had fallen off a dune and had back and neck injuries. He was also dehydrated.

The U.S. Coast Guard had to be called in to assist in his rescue because the area was not accessible by ATV or UTVs.

The man was airlifted and taken to a hospital.

Man jailed for stealing from fund for caddies

MI BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP — A man was sentenced to more than four years in prison for stealing more than \$600,000 from a college scholarship fund for caddies at one of Michigan's most exclusive golf clubs.

Craig Maass, 62, said he took money from the Oakland Hills Country Club fund while he was abusing alcohol and feeling dis-

tressed over a failed marriage. More than 100 checks totaling \$633,000 were written over a 13-month period.

Maass supervised the fund and, like his parents, was a club member, The Detroit News reported.

Maass pleaded no contest to embezzlement.

Police probe apparent motor oil dump in lake

VT MILTON — Vermont State Police are investigating what appeared to be the dumping of a large amount of motor oil in Arrowhead Mountain Lake in Milton, the agency said.

Fire departments from Georgia and Milton responded Sunday morning and took steps to contain the spill, which was later being cleaned up by contractors hired by the state, police said.

An environmental enforcement officer with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources also was investigating, officials said.

Anyone with information about the incident is asked to contact the Natural Resources Agency or Vermont State Police.

Deputies: Woman tried to set patrol car on fire

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — A woman was jailed after trying unsuccessfully to set a Florida deputy's patrol vehicle on fire, officials said.

The 25-year-old woman was arrested Sunday night at a Fort Lauderdale-area intersection, according to a Broward Sheriff's Office news release. She faces several charges, including ag-

gravated assault on a law enforcement officer and attempted arson.

The deputy was sitting in her marked unit at the intersection when the woman walked up to the vehicle, started banging on her window and broke off the driver-side mirror, officials said. The woman then walked to the rear of the vehicle, opened the gas tank cover and removed the gas cap. The woman placed paper items into the gas tank and used a lighter to set a lottery ticket on fire, authorities said.

The deputy believed the woman was intending to set the vehicle on fire. The deputy got out of the vehicle and ordered the woman onto the ground. The woman complied and other deputies arrived to help place her into custody. The patrol vehicle did not catch fire.

Armed man charged in disrupting tribal event

ME CARIBOU — A man armed with an assault rifle and a stun gun threatened people at a tribal event hosted by the Aroostook Band of Micmacs before fleeing into the woods over the weekend, police said.

The man was arrested after a standoff that began late Saturday, the Caribou Police Chief Michael Gahagan said in a statement.

The man was charged with criminal threatening with a dangerous weapon, possession of a firearm by a prohibited person, terrorizing, reckless conduct with a dangerous weapon, criminal threatening with a dangerous weapon and creating a police standoff, Gahagan said.

— From wire reports

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New transfer rule transforms rosters

Associated Press

Ideally, Florida State coach Mike Norvell will never need to build his team this way again.

The Seminoles have 14 transfers with more than 330 games of college experience on the roster after going 3-6 in Norvell's first year in Tallahassee.

When Florida State opens its season Sunday night at home against No. 9 Notre Dame, the 'Noles could have as many as six players who were at other schools last year in the starting lineup.

"I think a lot of it had to do with kind of where we were in the moment. We came off last year when we were the youngest team in college football. I mean, there's been quite a bit of change around our program," Norvell told The Associated Press.

This season will be the first since the NCAA tweaked its rules to give all football players the freedom to transfer once in their careers and be immediately eligible to play at their new school — no questions asked.

After years of incremental steps to loosen restrictions around transfers, full-on college football free agency is here. Teams can now revamp rosters and bolster depth charts in a manner similar to the way it is done in the NFL.

No team has more riding on transfers this season than Florida State, though there are others. Michigan State's second-year head coach, Mel Tucker, brought a bunch of new players into the program via the portal and had about a dozen go out. Kansas also has a dozen transfers on the roster for new coach Lance Leipold, who lured several of his players from Buffalo to Lawrence.

But Tucker and Leipold are not facing the same win-now pressure as Norvell. The once-mighty Seminoles have had three straight losing seasons and two head coaches since Jimbo Fisher left for Texas A&M at the end of the 2017 season.

The instability has taken a toll on recruiting and led to roster attrition. Facing another year of relying on inexperienced players to quickly blossom, Norvell decided Florida State didn't just need an influx of talent. It needed veteran leadership and players who understand what it takes to compete at the highest levels of college football.

"And I'm excited to see how it's all going to come together," Norvell said.

Among the most notable additions: Former UCF quarterback McKenzie Milton, who led the Knights through two unbeaten regular seasons before a gruesome leg injury nearly ended his career in 2018; Georgia defensive end Jermaine Johnson; and

Notre Dame guard Dillan Gibbons.

Norvell told the new guys he needed them to be assertive and to set the tone when it came to practice, preparation and work ethic.

"I don't take that lightly," Johnson said. "He's trusting me with an incredible role. My teammates trust me with an incredible role every day."

If Florida State is to once again become an elite program that can rival Clemson in the Atlantic Coast Conference, it will need to get there through recruiting. There are positive signs on that front. Florida State currently holds 18 verbal commitments for the class of 2022, a group ranked 10th in the country by 247 Sports' composite ratings.

But there is a chicken-and-egg aspect to recruiting. To win, coaches need to recruit well. To recruit well, coaches need to win.

If Norvell is going to attract the type of players that helped Florida State win three national titles, the last in 2013 under Fisher, the Seminoles need to show progress in 2021.

Texas State went even deeper into the portal than Florida State. The Bobcats' last signing class had 23 transfers and just two high school players — an ominous sign for those who fear the transfer portal will harm prep recruiting.

No. 9 Notre Dame turns to graduate transfer Coan

Associated Press

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — No quarterback since Tony Rice has delivered the goods Notre Dame's fanatical following has longed for since 1988—a national championship.

Not Rick Mirer, not Kevin McDougal, not Ron Powlus, not Brady Quinn, not Tommy Rees, not Everett Golson and not even the winningest Irish starting quarterback of them all — Ian Book, who twice led coach Brian Kelly's team to the College Football Playoff.

When No. 9 Notre Dame opens its season Sept. 5 at Florida State, Book's successor — Jack Coan, a graduate transfer from Wisconsin — will be asked to end the drought.

"Going into our opener, (Coan)

gives us the best chance for success," said Kelly, who begins his 12th season four victories short of passing Knute Rockne's 105 wins at the school.

The 22-year-old Coan, who beat out sophomore Drew Pyne and true freshman Tyler Buchner, is eager for his chance at Notre Dame, where he once was offered a lacrosse scholarship.

"Never in a million years did I think I'd end up here after going to Wisconsin," said the 6-foot-3¼, 223-pound former prep star from Sayville, N.Y.

Up front

With four-fifths of last year's starting offensive line now working in NFL camps, senior Jarrett Patterson returns as center. A preseason All-American, the 6-

foot-4½, 307-pound Patterson missed the end of the 2020 season and all of spring recovering from foot surgery, and is being reacquainted with his teammates who include 6-foot-2½, 310-pound grad transfer guard Cain Madden.

Offensive weapons

Williams will be spelled in the backfield by sophomore Chris Tyree, senior C'Bo Flemister, and true freshmen Audric Estime and Logan Diggs, who have been impressive. Sophomore Michael Mayer returns after a breakout year to head a deep tight end group.

The wideouts will be led by Avery Davis, seniors Joe Wilkins Jr. and Lawrence Keys III, impressive freshman Deion Colzie and

two seniors returning from injury-plagued 2020 seasons — speedsters Braden Lenzy and Kevin Austin Jr.

Defensive dude

Despite the loss of several starters including Butkus Award winner and rover Jeremiah Owusu-Koramoah, new defensive coordinator Marcus Freeman has several players with plenty of experience. The best of them is the 6-foot-4, 220-pound junior free safety Kyle Hamilton, who missed the spring after ankle surgery following a 2020 season during which he led the team in tackles.

"I remember last season (cornerback coach Mike) Mickens called me and said, 'We've got a dude that's special here,'" Freeman said.

Tigers out to push ACC run to 7 straight

Associated Press

James Skalski has been looking forward to third-ranked Clemson's opener against No. 5 Georgia on the same field where the Tigers maintain their Atlantic Coast Conference dominance.

"We usually end our regular season in Charlotte," the Tigers' linebacker said.

And there's no reason to expect otherwise in 2021, either.

Clemson is favored to win a seventh straight ACC championship in North Carolina's largest city by December. It is the headliner in a league that includes No. 10 North Carolina and No. 14 Miami as the only other teams in The Associated Press preseason Top 25 poll.

That run of dominance has made the Tigers the first power-conference team to win six straight league title games. It's also the longest run of ACC titles since Florida State won at least a share from 1992-2000 to start its stay in the league under late coach Bobby Bowden.

Last year's loss at Notre Dame — playing in a one-year stint as a full ACC member amid the COVID-19 pandemic — marked Clemson's first league

loss in three years. Overall, the Tigers have 10 straight seasons with double-digit wins, six straight berths in the College Football Playoff and two national championships under Dabo Swinney.

This year's team has big names to replace — namely No. 1 overall draft pick Trevor Lawrence at quarterback and two-time ACC player of the year Travis Etienne at running back. That will mean plenty of attention on new starting quarterback D.J. Uiagalelei, who had big performances with Lawrence out briefly due to COVID-19 protocols last season.

But there's a defense with Skalski among nine returning starters. That includes a defensive line with seven players who have started games, including Myles Murphy, Brian Bresee, Xavier Thomas, Justin Foster and Tyler Davis.

The favorites

Atlantic: Clemson. The Tigers are 52-3 against ACC teams during their current reign, with only one of those losses — in 2017 at Syracuse — coming in their division.

North Carolina State was

picked second in the Atlantic, followed by Boston College, Florida State, Wake Forest, Louisville and Syracuse.

Coastal: UNC. The Tar Heels start with a top-10 preseason ranking for the first time since 1997, which was the final season of coach Mack Brown's first stint with the Tar Heels. They have 18 starters back on offense and defense.

"I like to take it with a tremendous amount of pride," Brown said of high expectations. "Our fans can walk around right now with their chest stuck out because we're a preseason top-10 team. I don't take that as pressure."

Miami was picked second in the Coastal, followed by Virginia Tech, Pittsburgh, Virginia, Georgia Tech and Duke.

Top players

Sam Howell, North Carolina:

The junior quarterback is a candidate for the Heisman Trophy as well as to be one of the top NFL Draft picks. He enters this year as the preseason ACC player of the year while powering UNC's high-scoring attack, and Brown has already indicated this will be his final season with

the Tar Heels.

D.J. Uiagalelei, Clemson:

Lawrence's sophomore successor has size (6 feet, 4 inches and 250 pounds) and threw for nearly 800 yards in two midseason starts last year. "He's a great leader and everybody has confidence in him," Swinney said. "He makes everyone around him better."

D'Eriq King, Miami:

The quarterback is returning for a sixth season despite suffering a serious knee injury suffered in last year's bowl loss. He ranked in the Bowl Subdivision's top 25 in total offense and passing efficiency.

Payton Wilson, N.C. State:

The linebacker led the league at 10.8 tackles per game (13th in FBS) and was one of nine players nationally with at least 19 tackles in a game.

Restocked

Thirteen of the 14 league teams have a returning quarterback with starting experience. The exception is Duke, which is set to turn to Gunnar Holmberg as the Blue Devils try to take better care of the football after committing an FBS-worst 39 turnovers last year.

Meyer's comments on vaccine cause commotion

Associated Press

The NFL Players Association has launched an investigation following Jacksonville Jaguars coach Urban Meyer's admission that vaccination status factored into the team's roster decisions.

NFLPA spokesman George Atallah confirmed the union's action in an email to The Associated Press on Tuesday night, hours after Meyer told reporters: "Everyone was considered. That was part of the production, let's start talking about this and also, 'Is he vaccinated or not?' Can I say that that was a decision-maker? It was certainly in consideration."

The Jaguars attempted to clarify Meyer's comments Wednesday with a statement.

"Availability is one of the many factors taken into account when making roster deci-

sions," the team said. "We have vaccinated and unvaccinated players on our roster, and no player was released because of their vaccination status."

"Ultimately, decisions are based on a player's ability to help the Jaguars win. We educate our players and respect personal decisions as it pertains to the vaccine. We want to keep our players, staff and families safe as we comply with protocols related to both health and safety and competition on game days."

The NFL hasn't mandated COVID-19 vaccines but has incorporated strict protocols for players who aren't fully vaccinated.

The Indianapolis Colts have four projected starters on the reserve/COVID-19 list — quarterback Carson Wentz, left tackle Eric Fisher, center Ryan Kelly and receiver Zach

Pascal — and coach Frank Reich continues to make his pitch for one of the league's least-vaccinated teams to follow his lead.

Saints' opener moved

The New Orleans Saints will play their season opener in Jacksonville after being displaced by Hurricane Ida.

Instead of playing in the Superdome for the Sept. 12 game against Green Bay, the Saints will host the game at the home of the Jaguars, the NFL announced Wednesday.

While the Superdome appears to have been spared significant damage from the powerful Category 4 hurricane, there are logistical challenges with staffing an NFL game there in the near future because of the widespread damage in the New Orleans area.

Djokovic seeks calendar Slam's final leg

Associated Press

NEW YORK — If the last-name chorus of “Ruuuuuunee!” in support of his relatively unknown teenage opponent at the U.S. Open bothered Novak Djokovic, he never let anyone know.

Nor was there any visible evidence that Djokovic was shaken by the shaky patches he went through while dropping a set Tuesday night as he began his historic bid to complete the first calendar-year Grand Slam in men's tennis since 1969 and collect a record-breaking 21st major singles championship.

Djokovic was not perfect — “It wasn't the best of my performances,” he acknowledged — but he didn't need to be. All he needed to do was win, and he did, just as he's done every time he's played a Grand Slam match this season, whether on the hard courts of the Australian Open, the red clay of

the French Open, the grass of Wimbledon or, now, the first of what he hopes will be seven times on the hard courts of Flushing Meadows.

Quickly regaining control after a second-set blip, then wearing down his cramping foe, Djokovic beat Danish qualifier Holger Vitus Nodskov Rune 6-1, 6-7 (5), 6-2, 6-1 to reach the second round.

“I mean, obviously you always wish to have crowd behind you, but it's not always possible. That's all I can say. I mean, I don't know; I've been focusing on myself and what I need to do,” said Djokovic, who next faces Tallon Griekspoor, a 25-year-old from the Netherlands ranked 121st who got into the field when Roger Federer pulled out. “I guess I have to just see how it feels on the court and try to keep it together. That's all I can do.”

Afterward, 2019 U.S. Open champion Bianca Andreescu closed out the first round by edging Viktorija Golubic 7-5, 4-6, 7-5 in a match that ended at 12:45 a.m. on Wednesday.

Earlier on Day Two, the top-seeded woman, Ash Barty, made a successful return to the site of one of the two Grand Slam tournaments she has yet to win.

The biggest holdup for Barty during her 6-1, 7-6 (7) victory over 2010 U.S. Open runner-up Vera Zvonareva came early in the first set. There was a delay of more than five minutes because the Hawk-Eye Live electronic line-calling system went down when a TV camera wasn't working.

The capable-of-combustion Djokovic, kept a steady countenance Tuesday, even as a set slipped away and there was applause for his faults during the tiebreaker.

Phillies double up Nationals for 5th straight victory

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Bryce Harper hit a go-ahead single against his former team as part of a six-run sixth inning, Rafael Marchán, Andrew McCutchen and Brad Miller hit two-run homers, and the Philadelphia Phillies beat the Washington Nationals 12-6 for their fifth straight victory.

Carter Kieboom homered for Washington, which has lost four in a row and six of seven. The Nationals completed a 7-20 August, their worst full month since going 5-16 in April 2009.

Philadelphia took control against tiring starter Patrick Corbin (7-14) and Washington's erratic bullpen in the sixth. Corbin allowed six runs in five-plus innings.

Bailey Falter (2-0) pitched 1 2/3 scoreless innings for the victory.

Rays 8, Red Sox 5: Randy Arozarena, rookie Wander Franco and Tampa Bay won their ninth straight game, breaking away from Boston soon after Red Sox shortstop Xander Bogaerts was pulled because of a positive COVID-19 test.

Bogaerts hit an RBI single in the first inning, but was replaced defensively in the second.

It was announced before the game that Boston reliever Hirokazu Sawamura tested positive as a virus surge that started last week continues having a daily impact on playoff-contending Boston.

Mets 3-6, Marlins 1-5: Michael Conforto delivered a two-out hit that sent Javier Báez bolting home to cap a five-run rally in the ninth inning, then homered to lift host New York over Miami for a pair of wins.

In the afternoon opener — which was the completion of a nine-inning game suspended one out into the top of the first on April 11 — Conforto's single scored the tying run and Báez, too.

Angels 6, Yankees 4: Shohei Ohtani stole home, Jared Walsh hit a three-run homer and host Los Angeles hung on late to send New York to its fourth straight loss.

Phil Gosselin had a two-run single for the Angels before their troublesome bullpen preserved their third straight victory.

Raisel Iglesias pitched a perfect ninth for his 29th save.

Brewers 6, Giants 2: Lorenzo Cain homered and added an RBI single, and Milwaukee won its second straight at San Francisco.

All-Star right-hander Brandon Woodruff (9-7) struck out eight in six innings to win back-to-back starts for the first time since late June.

Padres 3, Diamondbacks 0: Blake Snell threw seven no-hit innings for San Diego before being pulled, and pinch-hitter David Peralta blooped a single into shallow left field in the eighth in a win at Arizona.

Dodgers 3, Braves 2: Corey Seager hit a tiebreaking double in the eighth inning, lifting Los Angeles to a victory over visiting Atlanta.

Athletics 9, Tigers 3: Matt Chapman hit a tiebreaking, two-run homer in the third inning and cleared the fences again in the ninth for his 23rd of the season, as Oakland won at Detroit.

Orioles 4, Blue Jays 2: Keegan Akin allowed one run through five innings and won consecutive starts for the first time, Ramón Urías hit a go-

ahead double in the sixth inning and Baltimore won at Toronto.

White Sox 4, Pirates 2: Yasmani Grandal and Jose Abreu homered, and five relievers combined for 4 2/3 innings of two-hit ball as host Chicago doubled up Pittsburgh.

Indians 7, Royals 2: Amed Rosario became the first player on record to go 5-for-5 with five RBIs, an inside-the-park homer and a drive over the fence, and Cleveland won at Kansas City.

Rangers 4, Rockies 3: Nathaniel Lowe had a home run and an RBI single among his three hits, Leody Taveras homered for the second straight game and host Texas hung on to beat Colorado for its third straight win.

Cubs 3, Twins 1: Frank Schwindel homered for the second straight game, Ian Happ added a towering homer into the third deck and Chicago won at Minnesota.

Mariners 4, Astros 0: Abraham Toro hit a grand slam against Kendall Graveman, whom he he was traded for last month, connecting in the eighth and sending host Seattle over Houston.