

Death toll from Ida's remnants rises

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A stunned U.S. East Coast woke up Thursday to a rising death toll, surging rivers and destruction after the remnants of Hurricane Ida walloped the region with record-breaking rain, filling low-lying apartments with water and turning roads into car-swallowing canals.

In a region that had been warned about potentially deadly flash flooding but hadn't braced for such a blow from the no-longer-hurricane, the storm killed at least 22 people from Maryland to New York on Wednesday night and Thursday morning.

Nine people died in New York City, police said, one of them in a car and eight in flooded basement apartments that often serve as relatively affordable homes for low-income people. Officials said at least eight died in New Jersey and three in Pennsylvania's suburban Montgomery County; one was killed by a falling tree, one drowned in a car and another in a home. An on-duty state trooper in Connecticut was swept away in his cruiser and later taken to a hospital, state police and local authorities said.

In New York City, Deborah Torres said water rapidly filled her first-floor Queens apartment to her knees as her landlord fran-

tically urged her neighbors below to get out, she said. But the water was rushing in so strongly that she surmised they weren't able to open the door.

"I have no words," she said. "How can something like this happen? And the worst is that there's a family downstairs with a baby, and they couldn't get out."

The remnants of Ida lost most of the storm's winds but kept its soggy core, then merged with a more traditional storm front and dropped an onslaught of rain on the Interstate 95 corridor, meteorologists said. The situation has followed hurricanes before, but experts said it was slightly exacerbated by climate change — warmer air holds more rain — and the urban setting, where expansive pavement prevents water from seeping into the ground.

The National Hurricane Center had warned since Tuesday of the potential for "significant and life-threatening flash flooding" and moderate and major river flooding in the mid-Atlantic region and New England.

Still, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said the storm's strength took them by surprise.

"We did not know that between 8:50 and 9:50 p.m. last night, that the heavens would

literally open up and bring Niagara Falls level of water to the streets of New York," said Hochul, a Democrat who became governor last week after former Gov. Andrew Cuomo resigned.

De Blasio said he'd gotten a forecast Wednesday of 3 to 6 inches of rain over the course of the day. The city's Central Park ended up getting 3.15 inches just in one hour of the deluge, surpassing the previous recorded high of 1.94 inches in one hour during Tropical Storm Henri on Aug. 21.

Water cascaded into subway tunnels, trapping at least 17 trains and forcing the cancelation of service throughout the night and early morning. Videos online showed riders standing on seats in cars filled with water. All riders were evacuated safely, officials said.

The FDR Drive in Manhattan and the Bronx River Parkway were under water during the storm. Garbage bobbed in the water rushing down streets. Some subway and rail service had resumed Thursday morning.

The ferocious storm also spawned tornadoes, including one that ripped apart homes and toppled silos in Mullica Hill, N.J., south of Philadelphia.

Sailors, Marines have less than 90 days to get vaccine

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

Most U.S. sailors and Marines have less than 90 days to get vaccinated against COVID-19 or face disciplinary action, according to a recent order from the Secretary of the Navy.

Secretary Carlos Del Toro issued the order "effective immediately," in an Aug. 21 naval administrative message that apparently anticipated Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's command for mandatory vaccinations three days later.

Del Toro gave reservists 120 days to get vaccinated. The deadlines fall on Nov. 19 and Dec. 19 for active-duty service members and reservists, respectively.

"As the faithful maritime protectors of our country in peacetime and war, each of

us must take ownership of our readiness to preserve and protect the force, and ensure the success of our mission," Del Toro wrote.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Aug. 23 granted approval to the two-shot Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which had been under emergency use authorization.

The following day, Austin ordered all troops to get vaccinated, at the direction of their respective services.

Vaccinations within the U.S. military were voluntary under the emergency use authorization. Only the Pfizer vaccine is approved, so far, although the others are still available at military clinics.

Some service members may be exempt, including those taking part in COVID-19 clinical trials until they conclude, accord-

ing to Del Toro's message.

However, unvaccinated sailors and Marines who previously contracted COVID-19 are not exempt, according to a separate administrative message from Vice Adm. W. R. Merz, deputy chief of naval operations for operations, plans and strategy.

Service members who received a medical exemption while vaccines were approved under an emergency use authorization will be reevaluated, according to Merz's Aug. 21 message.

The vaccine mandate is a lawful order and failure to comply is punishable under Article 92 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, according to Del Toro and Merz.

Punishments may include discharge from the service or disqualification for promotion or reenlistment.

Qatar base clinic improvises, aids 9 evacuee births

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Nine babies have been born at the expeditionary medical clinic at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar since the base became a main stopover for evacuees leaving Afghanistan last month, even though the clinic was not set up for infants.

The 379th Expeditionary Medical Group's patient population increased tenfold overnight the first day of the evacuation, according to an Air Force statement Thursday that cited chief medical officer Dr. Elaina Wild, an Air Force major.

Wild, a family medicine doctor back home, helped deliver the nine healthy babies, she said. The mothers are also doing well, she said.

"My faith in humanity is challenged every day by seeing the people we have to treat and the injuries they're sustaining," Wild said. "But it's restored every time I see what our medics and our people on the front lines are doing to save the lives of the evacuees."

The clinic team, which is made up largely of reservists, has had to improvise supplies and draw on the knowledge they bring from civilian jobs that Wild said were "extremely useful."

"It's interesting how the universe works," she said. "The group of people that are here right now are exactly the group of people that we needed when this hit."

Some work as optometrists or physical therapists in the service but are emergency medical technicians or labor and delivery nurses outside the military, the statement said.

Wild said members of the 379th EMDG sacrificed sleep and skipped meals to give to patients, and gave cold children the clothes off their backs.

Over 55,000 evacuees had been brought to the base as of Wednesday, with a single-day record of more than 17,500 housed on base, said a U.S. government official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the matter with Stars and Stripes. Most had already departed, the official said.

DOD: New law won't affect US Navy in South China Sea

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Navy operations in the South China Sea won't be affected by a new Chinese law requiring foreign vessels to give notice before entering waters claimed by Beijing, according to the Defense Department.

An amendment to China's 1983 Maritime Traffic Safety Law that took effect Wednesday requires certain vessels to provide a checklist of information, including call signs, positions, estimated time of arrival and the next port of call, the Chinese state-run Global Times reported Sunday.

The amendment specifies that submarines, nuclear-powered vessels and ships carrying dangerous substances, such as oil or chemicals, must notify Chinese officials before entering areas China claims as territorial waters, according to the Naval War College's Stockton Center for International Law.

The amendment was approved in April by China's Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.

However, U.S. forces, under international law, will continue to transit those areas or operate in them, according to a Defense De-

partment spokesman.

"The United States will continue to fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows," Lt. Col. Martin Meiners told Stars and Stripes in an email Wednesday.

The Navy's 7th Fleet routinely conducts freedom-of-navigation operations and transits through areas China has claimed as its territorial waters, including the Taiwan Strait and island chains in the South China Sea.

Most recently, the guided-missile destroyer USS Kidd steamed through the Taiwan Strait on Aug. 27, the Navy's eighth trip through the waterway this year.

The U.S. has long maintained that one nation's law "must not infringe" the rights of other nations under international law, Pentagon spokesman John Supple told Stars and Stripes in an email Wednesday.

"Unlawful and sweeping maritime claims, including in the South China Sea, pose a serious threat to the freedom of the seas, including the freedoms of navigation and overflight, free trade and unimpeded lawful commerce, and the rights and interests of South China Sea and other littoral nations," he said.

Uncertain when Taliban-controlled Kabul airport will reopen, envoy says

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Qatar's top diplomat said Thursday that experts are racing to reopen Kabul's airport but warned it was not clear when flights would resume, with many still desperate to flee Afghanistan's new Taliban leaders amid concerns over what their rule will hold.

In the wake of their rapid takeover, the Taliban have sought to calm those fears, including pledging to let women and girls attend school and allow people to travel freely. But many are skeptical, and Britain's foreign minister stressed the importance of engaging with the new rulers to test their promises.

Kabul's airport, a major way out of the country, is now in Taliban hands but is

closed, and Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani warned Thursday that there's still "no clear indication" of when it will reopen.

A team of Qatari and Turkish technicians flew to Kabul on Wednesday to help restart operations at the facility, which the U.N. says is crucial to providing the country with humanitarian assistance. It remains to be seen, however, whether any commercial airlines will be willing to offer service.

"We remain hopeful we will be able to operate it as soon as possible," Al Thani told reporters in Doha. "We are still in the evaluation process. ... We are working very hard and engaging with the Taliban to identify what are the gaps and the risks for having the airport back up and running."

High court lets abortion law in Texas stand

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A deeply divided Supreme Court is allowing a Texas law that bans most abortions to remain in force, for now stripping most women of the right to an abortion in the nation's second-largest state.

The court voted 5-4 to deny an emergency appeal from abortion providers and others that sought to block enforcement of the law that went into effect Wednesday. But the justices also suggested that their order likely isn't the last word on whether the law can stand because other challenges to it can still be brought.

The Texas law, signed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in

May, prohibits abortions once medical professionals can detect cardiac activity, usually around six weeks and before many women know they're pregnant.

It is the strictest law against abortion rights in the United States since the high court's landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973 and part of a broader push by Republicans nationwide to impose new restrictions on abortion. At least 12 other states have enacted bans early in pregnancy, but all have been blocked from going into effect.

The high court's order declining to halt the Texas law came just before midnight Wednesday. The majority said those

bringing the case had not met the high burden required for a stay of the law.

"In reaching this conclusion, we stress that we do not purport to resolve definitively any jurisdictional or substantive claim in the applicants' lawsuit. In particular, this order is not based on any conclusion about the constitutionality of Texas' law, and in no way limits other procedurally proper challenges to the Texas law, including in Texas state courts," the unsigned order said.

Chief Justice John Roberts dissented along with the court's three liberal justices. Each of the four dissenting justices wrote separate statements ex-

pressing their disagreement with the majority.

Roberts noted that while the majority denied the request for emergency relief, "the Court's order is emphatic in making clear that it cannot be understood as sustaining the constitutionality of the law at issue."

Justice Sonia Sotomayor called her conservative colleagues' decision "stunning."

"Presented with an application to enjoin a flagrantly unconstitutional law engineered to prohibit women from exercising their constitutional rights and evade judicial scrutiny, a majority of Justices have opted to bury their heads in the sand," she wrote.

Dems promote Cheney to vice chair of Jan. 6 panel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Democrats have promoted Republican Rep. Liz Cheney to vice chairwoman of a committee investigating the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection, placing her in a leadership spot on the panel as some members of the GOP caucus are threatening to oust her for participating.

Cheney, a fierce critic of former President Donald Trump, has remained defiant amid the criticism from her own party, insisting that Congress must probe the Capitol attack, in which hundreds of Trump's supporters violently pushed past police, broke into the building and interrupted the certification of Joe Biden's presidential election victory.

"We owe it to the American people to investigate everything that led up to, and transpired on, January 6th," Cheney, R-Wyo., said in a statement as Democrats announced her promotion on Thursday. "We will not be deterred by threats or attempted obstruction, and

we will not rest until our task is complete."

Cheney's appointment as vice chairwoman comes amid an effort by some Republicans to oust Cheney and Rep. Adam Kinzinger, of Illinois, from the GOP conference because they accepted their appointments to the panel from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. A draft letter by Arizona Rep. Andy Biggs to Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy obtained by The Associated Press calls Cheney and Kinzinger "two spies for the Democrats" whom Republicans cannot trust to attend their private meetings.

Cheney, who was booted from her position as GOP conference chairwoman earlier this year, has been undeterred by the criticism, despite serious primary challenges back home. The daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney has formed the unlikely alliance with Pelosi in what she has framed as an existential fight for the party and for democracy itself.

Intel shows extremists set to attend upcoming Capitol rally

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Far-right extremist groups like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers are planning to attend a rally later this month at the U.S. Capitol that is designed to demand "justice" for the hundreds of people who have been charged in connection with January's insurrection, according to three people familiar with intelligence gathered by federal officials.

As a result, U.S. Capitol Police have been discussing in recent weeks whether the large perimeter fence that was erected outside the Capitol after January's riot will need to be put back up, the people said.

The officials have been discussing security plans that involve reconstructing the fence as well as another plan that does not involve a fence, the people said. They were not authorized to speak publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

The planned Sept. 18 rally at the Capitol comes as a jittery Washington has seen a series of troubling one-off incidents —

including, most recently, a man who parked a pickup truck near the Library of Congress and said he had a bomb and detonator. Among the most concerning events: A series of unexploded pipe bombs placed around the U.S. Capitol ahead of the Jan. 6 insurrection remain unexploded and no suspect has been charged.

On Capitol Hill, the politics around fencing in the iconic building and its grounds were extremely difficult for lawmakers after the Jan. 6 insurrection. Many said they disliked closing off access, even as they acknowledged the increased level of security it provided.

The decision on whether to erect the fence again will likely be considered by the Capitol Police Board, according to a House aide familiar with the matter and granted anonymity to discuss it. No decisions have been made. The board consists of the Sergeant at Arms of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Sergeant at Arms and Doorkeeper of the U.S. Senate, and the Architect of the Capitol.

Winds provide hope in Calif. wildfire battle

Associated Press

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. — With winds finally turning in their favor, firefighters are throwing all their resources into boxing a California blaze that was scant miles from Lake Tahoe and neighboring Nevada.

Three days of fiercely gusting winds had driven the Caldor Fire east through the rugged Sierra Nevada, forcing tens of thousands of people from the region of forests, mountain hamlets, resorts and alpine lakes.

The winds were expected to calm heading into the weekend, although the humidity remained low and the eastern side of the vast wildfire was still burning trees and running through explosively dry grasslands into rugged areas hard for firefighters to reach, authorities said.

The blaze was also throwing

sparks that caught trees and created spot fires up to a mile ahead of the main wall of flames.

“We’re battling what we can battle and waiting for those winds to subside,” said Stephen Vollmer, a fire behavior analyst for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Even so, the forecast made fire officials cautiously optimistic.

The change could allow fire crews to get into densely forested areas to begin clearing toppled trees and branches that had blocked routes to remote communities, thus making it safer for evacuees to return, Vollmer said.

Fire crews from around the country were being thrown into the fight against the fire, which was just 23% contained after destroying at least 700 homes and other buildings since breaking

out Aug. 14.

Climate change has made the West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent, destructive and unpredictable, scientists say.

The Caldor Fire threatened at least 33,000 more homes and structures. On Wednesday, firefighters were ferried by boat to protect cabins at Echo Lake, a few miles south of Tahoe.

Heavenly Mountain Resort, Tahoe’s largest ski area, was being used as a staging area by firefighters. The resort also brought out its big guns — snow-making devices that were being used to hose down buildings.

One spur of the fire was roughly 3 miles south of the recently evacuated city of South Lake Tahoe, moving northeast toward the California-Nevada

state line, authorities said.

Crews worked to keep flames away from urban communities, where houses are close together and shopping centers, hotels and other structures would provide even more fuel.

Thick smoke has enveloped the city of South Lake Tahoe, which is all but deserted at a time when it would normally be swarming with tourists.

After casinos and stores closed on the Nevada side on Wednesday morning, evacuation holdouts lacking cars lined up outside the Montbleu resort and casino in Stateline, awaiting a bus to Reno.

On Wednesday, President Joe Biden issued a federal emergency declaration and ordered federal assistance to supplement state and local resources for firefighting efforts and relief for residents in four counties affected by the fire.

US jobless claims again fall, but variant clouds outlook

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits fell last week to 340,000, a pandemic low, another sign that the job market is steadily rebounding from the economic collapse caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Jobless claims dropped by 14,000, the Labor Department reported Thursday. The weekly count has mostly fallen steadily since topping 900,000 in early January.

Vaccinations for COVID-19 have been supporting the job market by encouraging businesses to reopen or expand hours and consumers to return to restaurants, bars and shops. In response, employers across the country have been boosting hiring to meet a surge in consumer demand.

Still, a resurgence of cases tied

to the highly contagious delta variant has clouded the economic outlook. COVID-19 cases are now surpassing 135,000 a day, up from fewer than 12,000 in early July.

The pace of weekly applications for unemployment aid is still high by historic standards. Before COVID-19 hit the United States hard in March 2020, the number averaged around 220,000 a week.

Filings for jobless aid have long been regarded as a real-time measure of the labor market’s health. But their reliability has diminished during the pandemic. In many states, the weekly figures have been inflated by fraud and by multiple filings from unemployed Americans trying to navigate bureaucratic hurdles to obtain benefits. Those complications help explain why the pace of applications remains unusually high despite strong hiring.

Judge conditionally OKs Purdue Pharma settlement

Associated Press

A federal bankruptcy judge gave conditional approval Wednesday to a sweeping settlement that will remove the Sackler family from ownership of OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma and devote potentially \$10 billion to fighting the opioid crisis that has killed a half-million Americans over the past two decades.

If it withstands appeals, the deal will resolve a mountain of 3,000 lawsuits from state and local governments, Native American tribes, unions and others that accuse the company of helping to spark the overdose epidemic by aggressively marketing the prescription painkiller.

Under the settlement, the Sacklers will have to get out of the opioid business altogether and contribute \$4.5 billion. But they will be shielded from any future lawsuits over opioids.

The drugmaker itself will be reorganized into a new charity-oriented company and will funnel its profits into government-led efforts to prevent and treat addiction. Also, the settlement sets up a compensation fund that will pay some victims of drugs an expected \$3,500 to \$48,000 each.

After an all-day hearing in which he analyzed the plan’s pros and cons for a nonstop 6½ hours, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Robert Drain said he would approve it as long as two relatively small changes were made. If so, he said, he would formally enter the decision on Thursday. The deal comes nearly two years after the Stamford, Conn.-based company filed for bankruptcy.

Under the settlement, the Sacklers were not given immunity from criminal charges, though there have been no indications they will face any.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Case against former police officer advances

CO LOVELAND — A former Colorado police officer involved in the rough arrest of an elderly woman with dementia should stand trial for assault, a judge ruled Monday.

District Judge Michelle Brinegar said there is probable cause for the charge against former Loveland police officer Austin Hopp, who will be arraigned later this month, the Loveland Reporter-Herald reported.

Hopp arrested Karen Garner in June 2020 after she left a store without paying for about \$14 worth of items. His body camera footage shows him catching up to the woman as she walked through a field along a road. Gardner, now 74, shrugged and turned away from him and he quickly grabbed her arm and pushed her 80-pound body to the ground.

Teen charged, allegedly shot a fellow student

NC WILMINGTON — A teen has been charged after a student was shot during a fight at a North Carolina high school on Monday, the sheriff's office said.

Several students were fighting around 11 a.m. at New Hanover High School when a 15-year-old shot another juvenile, New Hanover County Sheriff Ed McMahon said at a news conference. The wounded student was taken to a hospital and his injuries aren't considered life-threatening, McMahon said. Both teens are students at the school, according to county schools spokesman Russell Clark.

Authorities have arrested and charged the 15-year-old with at-

tempted first-degree murder, assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill inflicting serious injury and weapons offenses, the sheriff's office said.

2 men charged after digging at dinosaur site

MA HOLYOKE — Two men were arrested on suspicion of digging in an area of protected fossilized dinosaur footprints, authorities in Massachusetts said.

The men, from New Jersey and Connecticut, were seen by police walking up the stairs at the site along the Connecticut River in Holyoke carrying out rocks and tools Saturday afternoon, Capt. Matthew Moriarty said. They told police they didn't think they were digging in the protected area.

"A check of the reservation map was made and it appears their digging was on the protected land," Moriarty said.

Crematorium apologizes for condition of bodies

ME LEWISTON — A funeral home operator who is accused of leaving bodies unattended without refrigeration apologized through his attorney, who says the business owner was going through a personal crisis.

A letter from the attorney for Affordable Cremation Solutions owner Ken Kincer said the man was in the grips of substance abuse and that his life had become a "living nightmare," WMTW-TV reported.

The business was shut down and its funeral licenses were suspended in June by Maine's Board of Funeral Service. Investigators cited a public health violation because they found an odor of de-

composition and the unrefrigerated bodies of 11 people in the basement.

Ex-school officer charged with soliciting a minor

SC SPARTANBURG — A former South Carolina school resource officer faces criminal charges after police said she tried to solicit sexual activity from a 14-year-old student.

Agents with the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division arrested Caitlenn Lee Wooten on Tuesday. Wooten had previously worked as an officer with the Inman Police Department and served as a school officer at T.E. Mabry Middle School in Spartanburg County, according to a SLED news release. Police said Wooten attempted to coerce the student into sexual activity while working at the middle school.

The 29-year-old is also accused of providing minors with nicotine and alcohol, as well as distributing obscene material to a minor. She also faces a misconduct in office charge.

Some donations to help lawmaker may go back

MN ST. PAUL — Some donations to help with child care for a Minnesota lawmaker who recently cut off three fingers in a power saw accident will probably have to be returned, according to officials.

A GoFundMe web page was created to help Rep. Erin Koegel and her family as she recovers from the Aug. 22 accident. The Spring Lake Park Democrat lost control of a power saw, severing three fingers on her left hand. Doctors were able to reattach one

of the three fingers.

As of Wednesday morning, nearly \$8,800 had been raised on the web page, exceeding the \$5,000 goal. But some of the donations raised eyebrows among those familiar with the state's lobbying law, the St. Paul Pioneer Press reported. The donations from some on the list would appear to be a violation of a state law that generally prohibits state lawmakers and other public officials and employees from accepting most gifts worth more than \$5 from lobbyists.

City skirted no-bid laws in ice rink renovation

NJ NEWARK — New Jersey's largest city violated state guidelines when it financed a \$5.4 million contract to renovate a public ice skating rink, when the cost should have been borne by the entity doing the work, a state comptroller's report released Wednesday concluded.

The report by acting State Comptroller Kevin Walsh found Newark didn't conduct a public bidding process when it selected Devils Renaissance Development, a private entity associated with the New Jersey Devils NHL team, to renovate the rink at the Sharpe James and Kenneth A. Gibson Recreation and Aquatic Center in East Newark.

Under New Jersey's Adopt-a-Park statute, a municipality can contract with a private entity for maintaining, operating or improving a public park without having to seek competitive pricing, as long as the agreement comes at no cost to the municipality. Newark issued \$5.2 million in bonds in 2017 to pay for the project, according to the report.

— From wire reports



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No. 5 Georgia feels comfortable at QB

Associated Press

JT Daniels starred for a powerhouse team in high school.

He launched his college career at one of the most storied programs in the nation.

Yet none of that quite prepared this laid-back Californian for the passion that goes along with playing for the Georgia Bulldogs, for playing in the Southeastern Conference.

“Football is just another thing on the West Coast vs. football being THE thing here,” Daniels said. “I still remember the first time me and my family drove from the Atlanta airport to Athens and seeing all the Georgia Bulldog flags flying everywhere, to experience what it’s like for football to be such a main focal point. I’ve loved it ever since I got here.”

Now, in what very well could be his only full season as Georgia’s starting quarterback, the Bulldogs and their red-and-black faithful are optimistic that Daniels can lead them to an elusive national championship.

He gave them a tantalizing glimpse of what he can accomplish after moving to the top of the depth chart late in the pandemic-plagued 2020 season.

Daniels guided Georgia to four straight victories, throwing for 401 yards and four touchdowns in his Bulldogs debut against Mississippi State and capping the season by rallying the team to a last-second triumph over Cincinnati in the Peach Bowl.

But none of those opponents was on the level of Georgia’s season opener Saturday, when the No. 5 Bulldogs take on the third-ranked Clemson Tigers in Charlotte.

If Daniels is hyped for the moment, it doesn’t show.

“I approach it the same way I do anybody else — it’s just another game of football,” he insisted. “It’s cool to have a game like this in Week 1. But if we beat Clemson by 100 and lose the rest of the season, we’re not going to make it to the SEC (championship). And if Clemson wins by 100, we can still win the SEC if everything else goes our way.”

It’s clear this is the sort of game that Daniels has long expected to play a leading role in, going back to his days at Mater Dei High School near Los Angeles.

The private school has produced a plethora of top athletes across a wide range of sports, so there was plenty of attention on Daniels after he threw for more than 12,000 yards — with an astonishing 152 touchdowns and just 14 interceptions — over his high school career.

Daniels was one of the nation’s top recruits — No. 1 on some lists — when he signed with Southern California ahead of the 2018 season. He quickly locked down the No. 1 job in preseason camp to become just the second true freshman quarterback to start for the Trojans in his first game.

To that point, everything was going according to plan. But Daniels looked a bit overwhelmed that first season and USC struggled to a 5-7 mark. He held on to the starting job the next season, only to sustain a season-ending knee injury in the opener.

When it became clear the Trojans were going in a different direction, Daniels decided to transfer to Georgia. The Bulldogs needed a replacement for three-year start-

er Jake Fromm, but the newcomer wasn’t fully recovered from his knee injury and started out working with the scout team in non-contact drills.

While Georgia struggled to settle on a starter — starting with redshirt freshman D’Wan Mathis, quickly switching to former non-scholarship backup Stetson Bennett, and then giving Mathis one last shot — Daniels stoically put in the work to persuade the Bulldogs that he was completely healthy.

“I was impressed with how he handled it,” said Georgia linebacker Nakobe Dean, who got in a lot of work against Daniels in practice. “Coming from where he came from and who he was, how he handled being on the scout team, how he attacked it every day, gave us all the confidence in the world in him.”

When Daniels finally earned the starting nod, the Bulldogs’ hopes of winning the SEC had faded with losses to Alabama and Florida.

But his performance over those final four games — Daniels completed 67.2% of his throws for 1,231 yards, with 10 touchdowns and two interceptions — has given Georgia a huge boost of confidence heading into a season that has again raised hopes of claiming its first national title since 1980.

“I am extremely confident in his preparation and his focus; that is not a concern for me,” Smart said. “The distractions of the outside world really aren’t distractions for JT. He has a single-minded focus all the time on being his best and being the best leader he can.”

King’s return behind center buoys Canes’ hopes

Associated Press

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — It was either the first or second day of Miami training camp. D’Eriq King was running a quarterback keeper. He planted his right foot in the turf, bent his surgically rebuilt knee, made a hard cut and took off.

Nothing bad happened.

Just like that, the Hurricanes’ offseason became a success.

Much of the hope that No. 14 Miami carries into this season — and Saturday’s season opener in Atlanta against No. 1 Alabama — is because of King, the sixth-year dual-threat quarterback who

tore his right ACL in the Hurricanes’ bowl game against Oklahoma State last December. He vowed that he’d be back to face the Crimson Tide and after seven near-constant months of rehabilitation he’s ready to go against the defending national champions.

“Cutting, that was one of the final steps for me and my rehab,” King said. “That’s how I tore my knee. To get over that hump, to be able to say ‘OK, can I cut?’ ... honestly, for me, that was a big thing.”

He’s on pace to leave Miami as its career leader in completion

percentage, no small feat at a place once known as “Quarterback U.”

If this is going to be the year in which the Hurricanes return to title contending, King is almost certainly going to be the reason why.

To get here, King also had to be a great patient.

Having surgery on Jan. 4, seven months before training camp and eight months before the season opener, clearly meant there was no time to waste if King was to be ready to play against Alabama.

The rehab was intense and as a

reward for good days, King would be allowed to go throw. Problem was, he couldn’t stand. So, to ensure that he wouldn’t damage the knee, someone would bring a stool onto the practice field, he’d take a seat and then fire off about 15 to 20 passes.

“It was almost like different stages of grief,” Miami coach Manny Diaz said. “At first, there was denial. ‘I’m not hurt that bad.’ And then there’s the anger. And then it was just time to move on to the next step. D’Eriq himself said he was angry for maybe a day or two, but then he put that aside and he got to work.”

Stephens eliminates Gauff from US Open

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Three years ago, a reporter asked Sloane Stephens to point out a younger tennis player most fans might not have heard of yet, someone she thought could become a household name some day. Stephens paused to ponder, but not for long, before responding: Coco Gauff, then 14.

Stephens had first met Gauff several years earlier — they last hit together on a court in Florida when Gauff was 12 — and clearly knew what she was talking about. The world would quickly discover Gauff, too. The pair of friends met in an official match for the first time Wednesday night at the U.S. Open, and it was Stephens, the 2017 champion now ranked 66th, who pulled away for a 6-4, 6-2 victory over Gauff, now 17 and seeded 21st.

Afterward, the pair met at the net for a warm hug, before Stephens praised the player — and person — Gauff has become.

“I love Coco. I think everyone

knows I love Coco. At the end of the match, I said, ‘I love you.’ She’s such a great player and I feel so lucky to have seen her grow up and play since she was 8,” Stephens told the Arthur Ashe Stadium crowd.

“I know there’s going to be great things ahead for her,” Stephens added.

With the Ashe roof shut during a heavy downpour brought by remnants of Hurricane Ida — a tornado warning was in effect in the region and there was flooding around the grounds of the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center — the thump-thump-thump of the rain created a bass beat that drowned out the usual sounds of a tennis match. It was so loud Stephens could barely hear the questions during her on-court interview.

Only one other court at Flushington Meadows can be covered during bad weather, but even that was an issue Wednesday evening because wind helped push rain through the space between the concourse and the re-

tractable cover at Louis Armstrong Stadium — a gap there on purpose to provide natural ventilation. So the match between two-time major finalist Kevin Anderson and Diego Schwartzman was delayed for nearly a half-hour at 5-all in the first set while workers used air blowers to dry the playing surface, then stopped again early in the second set when the court got so wet that efforts to clear the puddles were abandoned.

Eventually, the tournament gave up on getting that match done in Armstrong and decided to move it to Ashe, where Schwartzman wrapped up a 7-6 (4), 6-3, 6-4 win just past 1 a.m., following the conclusion of French Open runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas’ 6-3, 6-4, 6-7 (4), 6-0 victory over Adrian Panatta. Those moving on in the men’s draw in the afternoon included No. 2 Daniil Medvedev, No. 5 Andrey Rublev and 18-year-old Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz, who takes on Tsitsipas next.

The match to determine the

next foe for Stephens — three-time Slam champ Angelique Kerber vs. Anhelina Kalinina — was supposed to be played in Armstrong following Anderson-Schwartzman, but was postponed until Thursday.

The conditions didn’t matter at all to defending champion Naomi Osaka, who advanced in the morning when her second-round opponent, Olga Danilovic, pulled out of the tournament because of what she said was a viral illness — but not COVID-19.

Other past major title winners Simona Halep, Garbiñe Muguruza and Victoria Azarenka moved on more conventionally with straight-set wins. Muguruza next faces Azarenka, who in addition to a pair of Australian Open trophies is a three-time runner-up at the U.S. Open, including when she lost to Osaka in the final a year ago.

Osaka hasn’t been beaten in a Grand Slam match since losing to Gauff at the 2020 Australian Open.

World Cup qualifying begins for American men’s team

Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador — They landed on a charter flight, just three veterans of the devastating defeat four years earlier along with 20 fresh faces and a new coaching staff. Christian Pulisic and Zack Steffen were left behind.

Rebuilding over, the United States opened the 2022 World Cup qualifying at El Salvador’s Estadio Cuscatlán on Thursday night missing two of its top starters, one because of COVID-19 and the other because of back spasms. It was the start of an unprecedented schedule that features three matches in the first week and 14 in a 210-day span that for some will include five trans-Atlantic interruptions to their European club seasons.

This future could not have been imagined this when dejected U.S. players trudged off the field following the ignominious night in Trinidad that ended a streak of seven straight World Cup appearances.

“I remember where I was when when the U.S. failed to qualify back in 2017,” said Matt

Turner, who started in goal. “And to think about that moment from my couch and to be here now to, to have the opportunity to have a say in righting the ship is truly an honor.”

Turner, who watched that night from Walpole, Mass., knows World Cup qualifiers in Central America and the Caribbean are far different from what players experience in Europe and in Major League Soccer.

“Bad pitches maybe,” midfielder Weston McKennie said, “hot weather, maybe bad refs. It’s just things we’re going to learn on the way and I think it’s things we’re going to adapt to as a group.”

The U.S. is ranked 10th, its highest since 2006, after winning the CONCACAF Nations League and Gold Cup, and El Salvador is 64th. Los Cuscatlecos have reached just two World Cups, in 1970 and 1982, and the U.S. has 18 wins, five draws and one loss in the matchup, which includes a 17-game unbeaten streak (15 victories). The U.S. won the most recent meeting 6-0 in an exhibition in December.

Three of the eight nations in regional finals

qualify and fourth place advances to a playoff. But there are rarely easy games for the U.S. in Central America.

“The one thing that I learned from playing with the youth national teams in Central America would be that you can’t be naive in these games,” said midfielder Tyler Adams, who played at the 2015 CONCACAF Under-17 tournament in Honduras, and the 2017 Under-20 competition in Costa Rica. “When you go into these games being naive, thinking that they’re going to be an easy game or that there’s going to be opportunity to score a lot of goals, I think this is where you are able to make a lot of mental mistakes. And for us going into this game, we need to be prepared for a challenge, for a battle, that it might not be pretty football.”

Pulisic returned to training Monday but hasn’t played in a match since Aug. 14, missing Chelsea’s last two games following a positive COVID-19 test — he was vaccinated and said he didn’t show symptoms. He was left in Nashville, along with Steffen, who woke up Wednesday with back spasms.

Flores reiterates Tua is Dolphins' QB

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Miami Dolphins coach Brian Flores publicly expressed his support for quarterback Tua Tagovailoa on Wednesday, which may or may not tamp down speculation about the team's interest in Houston quarterback Deshaun Watson.

Tagovailoa will be the Week 1 starter against the New England Patriots on Sept. 12, Flores said.

"Yes. I don't know if I can be more clear," Flores said. "I don't know how many times I'll say it. I don't know how much more clear I can be here. Tua is the starter. I mean, if I need to say it again, I will."

Naturally, Tagovailoa was happy to hear Flores' comments.

"I think it means a lot, with it coming from the head coach," he said. "The support that I have from him, from the team, it means a lot. For me, I'm just focused litera-

lly on trying to get our guys ready for next week."

The Dolphins have declined to confirm or deny reports they have engaged in trade talks to acquire Watson, who has been accused of sexual assault and harassment in lawsuits filed by 22 women. He has denied the allegations.

No charges have been filed against Watson, who has made the Pro Bowl the past three seasons. His availability this season is unclear, and Houston police and the NFL are investigating the allegations against him.

"You know what's funny? I heard (DT John Jenkins) just say he doesn't have cable," Tagovailoa said. "I'm one of those guys that don't have cable, too. So I'm not able to turn on my TV and watch what's going on, to see the news and whatnot."

"Now, obviously I know social media's a big deal but really, I only hear about those

things from my agents or if it comes from (Miami communications executive) Anne Noland or if coach wants to sit down and talk to me about things like that. That's kind of how I find out a lot of the talk that's going on."

Speculation regarding a possible trade has raised questions about Miami's commitment to Tagovailoa, a top-five draft pick last year.

"Tua is our quarterback," Flores said. "I think he has had a good training camp. I think he has made a lot of progress. I think he has made a lot of improvement. We're pleased with where he is."

Tagovailoa had a 6-3 record as a starter as a rookie after replacing Ryan Fitzpatrick after six games. He passed for 1,814 yards with 11 touchdowns and five interceptions, and was pulled in favor of Fitzpatrick in games against the Denver Broncos and Las Vegas Raiders.

Yankees' Cole strikes out 15 Angels for his 14th win

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Gerrit Cole racked up a season-high 15 strikeouts over seven innings to earn his AL-leading 14th victory, and the New York Yankees snapped a four-game losing streak with a 4-1 victory over the Los Angeles Angels on Wednesday night.

Aaron Judge hit his 30th homer and Luke Voit had a two-run single for the Yankees, who had won 13 straight before their skid.

Cole (14-6) yielded four hits and didn't walk a batter while posting his biggest strikeout total since joining the Yankees. Aroldis Chapman pitched the ninth for his 25th save.

Dodgers 4, Braves 3: Justin Turner and AJ Pollock singled home the tying and go-ahead runs through the same infield hole in the eighth inning, and host Los Angeles completed a three-game sweep of Atlanta.

The Dodgers staked Max Scherzer to an early 2-0 lead, and he was dominating the NL East-leading Braves when he left after

76 pitches. The right-hander struck out nine and walked none in six innings.

Austin Barnes homered for Los Angeles. Dansby Swanson hit a tiebreaking solo home run, his 26th, for Atlanta.

Brewers 5, Giants 2: Jace Peterson hit a go-ahead single in the seventh, Lorenzo Cain homered for a second straight game and Milwaukee knocked San Francisco out of the top spot in the National League for the first time in more than three months.

The Giants (84-49) matched their longest losing streak of the season at four and fell to second in the NL West after a San Francisco-era best 108 days on top since May 30.

Mariners 1, Astros 0: Seattle rookie right-hander Logan Gilbert and four relievers combined to shut out visiting Houston for the second straight day and J.P. Crawford scored the lone run on a sacrifice fly.

The Mariners took two of three in the series from the AL West leaders. They managed just three hits off Astros starter

Jake Odorizzi (6-7) and four relievers.

Red Sox 3, Rays 2: Jarren Duran had a tiebreaking RBI single in the ninth and visiting Boston stopped AL East-leading Tampa Bay's nine-game winning streak.

Red Sox infielder Yairo Muñoz became the latest on the team to test positive for the coronavirus. Eight Boston players and two coaches have either had a positive test or are considered close contacts since last Friday.

Blue Jays 5, Orioles 4: Randal Grichuk hit a tiebreaking sacrifice fly in the eighth inning and host Toronto beat Baltimore.

Marcus Semien hit a solo home run and Lourdes Gurriel Jr. had two hits and two RBIs to help the Blue Jays take two of three from the Orioles.

Tigers 8, Athletics 6: Miguel Cabrera hit a two-run homer, No. 502 of his career, and drove in the go-ahead run with a single in the seventh inning as host Detroit snapped a four-game skid with a win over Oakland.

Cardinals 5-2, Reds 4-12:

Nick Castellanos drove in six runs with a grand slam and a two-run shot in the first two innings of the second game, and host Cincinnati earned a double-header split with St. Louis.

Cubs 3, Twins 0: Frank Schwindel hit a three-run homer and a pair of pitchers combined on a two-hitter in Chicago's win at Minnesota.

Rockies 9, Rangers 5: Brendan Rodgers' two-run double put his team ahead during a five-run ninth inning, and Colorado rallied from an early 5-0 deficit to win at Texas.

Diamondbacks 8, Padres 3: Josh VanMeter homered in a six-run third inning as host Arizona knocked out Yu Darvish early and beat San Diego.

White Sox 6, Pirates 3: Rookie Gavin Sheets hit two home runs, leading host Chicago over Pittsburgh.

Indians 5, Royals 3 (11): Austin Hedges popped an RBI single just out of reach of first baseman Carlos Santana for the tiebreaking run in the 11th inning and Cleveland won at Kansas City.