

## COVID cases, deaths climb in US — again

*Associated Press*

COVID-19 deaths and cases in the United States have climbed back to levels not seen since last winter, erasing months of progress and potentially bolstering President Joe Biden's argument for his sweeping new vaccination requirements.

The cases — driven by the delta variant combined with resistance among some Americans to getting the vaccine — are concentrated mostly in the South.

While one-time hot spots like Florida and Louisiana are improving, infection rates are soaring in Kentucky, Georgia and Tennessee, fueled by children now back in school, loose mask restrictions and low vaccination levels.

The dire situation in some hospitals is starting to sound like January's infection peak: Surgeries canceled in hospitals in Washington state and Utah. Severe staff shortages in Kentucky and Alabama. A lack of beds in Tennessee. Intensive care units at or over capacity in Texas.

The deteriorating picture nine months into the nation's vaccination drive has angered and frustrated medical professionals who

see the heartbreak as preventable. The vast majority of the dead and the hospitalized have been unvaccinated, in what has proved to be a hard lesson for some families.

"The problem now is we have been trying to educate based on science, but I think most of the education that is happening now is based on tragedy, personal tragedy," said Dr. Ryan Stanton, an emergency room physician in Lexington, Ky.

In Kentucky, 70% of the state's hospitals — 66 of 96 — are reporting critical staff shortages, the highest level yet during the pandemic, the governor said.

"Our hospitals are at the brink of collapse in many communities," said Dr. Steven Stack, Kentucky's public health commissioner.

The U.S. is averaging over 1,800 COVID-19 deaths and 170,000 new cases per day, the highest levels respectively since early March and late January. Both figures have also been on the rise over the past two weeks.

The country is still well below the terrifying peaks reached in January, when it was averaging about 3,400 deaths and a quarter-

million cases per day.

The U.S. is dispensing about 900,000 vaccinations per day, down from a high of 3.4 million a day in mid-April. On Friday, a Food and Drug Administration advisory panel will meet to discuss whether the U.S. should begin giving booster shots of the Pfizer vaccine.

On a positive note, the number of people now in the hospital with COVID-19 appears to be leveling off or even declining at around 90,000, or about where things stood in February.

Last week, the president ordered all employers with more than 100 workers to require vaccinations or weekly tests, a measure affecting about 80 million Americans. The roughly 17 million workers at health facilities that receive federal Medicare or Medicaid will also have to be fully vaccinated.

Measures aimed at containing the virus, however, have run into opposition. Last week, a Tennessee high school student who spoke at a school board meeting in favor of a mask mandate was heckled by adults while he talked about his grandmother dying from the virus.

## Two Koreas fire ballistic missiles in separate tests

**BY DAVID CHOI**

*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The two Koreas fired ballistic missiles in separate tests Wednesday as officials from neighboring countries held meetings to discuss tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea fired two ballistic missiles into the sea off its eastern coast in the afternoon, according to the South Korean military.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff confirmed those launches to Stars and Stripes and said the missiles flew about 500 miles at a maximum altitude of 37 miles.

"Our military tightened surveillance and security, [maintained] their readiness posture, and the [South Koreans] and the U.S. are working closely together," a JSC spokesperson said in a text message on the customary condition of anonymity.

Meanwhile, South Korea announced it

had succeeded in test-firing a submarine-launched ballistic missile, according to the Agency for Defense Development.

It is now one of a handful of nations to successfully develop an SLBM after the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and India. North Korea also claims to have successfully test-fired one.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in was expected to meet Wednesday with the National Security Council about the North Korean missile test, according to a statement from the presidential Blue House.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the missiles did "not pose an immediate threat to U.S. personnel or territory, or to our allies."

"The missile launch highlights the destabilizing impact of [North Korea's] illicit weapons program," a statement from the command added.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga

told reporters the missiles landed in the sea outside of his country's exclusive economic zone. He called the launches "outrageous" actions that threaten peace and security in the region.

The United Nations Security Council expressly forbids North Korea from testing ballistic missiles, which are powered by rockets and fly in a high arch.

The launches come days after Pyongyang said it fired long-range cruise missiles that flew 932 miles for over two hours on Saturday and Sunday.

The missiles' range, if accurate, would be enough to reach Tokyo.

Jet-powered cruise missiles fly at lower altitudes and are harder to detect than ballistic missiles.

The launches happened amid a trilateral meeting in Tokyo, where the U.S. envoy for North Korea was meeting with his counterparts from South Korea and Japan.

# Trump: Try Milley for treason if book is true

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former President Donald Trump said the chairman of the Joint Chiefs should be tried for treason if the general told his Chinese counterpart he would provide warning in the event of a U.S. attack.

According to the book “Peril,” written by Washington Post journalists Bob Woodward and Robert Costa, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley feared Trump would order a strike on China in the waning days of his presidency.

The book says Milley told Gen. Li Zuocheng of the People’s Liberation Army that the United States would not strike. One call took place on Oct. 30, 2020, four days before the election that defeated Trump. The second call was on Jan. 8, 2021, just two days after the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol by supporters of the outgoing chief executive.

Milley went so far as to promise Li that he would warn his counterpart in the event of a U.S. attack, according to the book.

Trump responded Tuesday with a sharply worded statement dismissing Milley as a “dumbass,” and insisting he never considered attacking China.

Still, he said that if the report was true, “I assume he would be tried for TREASON in that he would have been dealing with his Chinese counterpart behind the President’s back and telling China that he would be giving them notification ‘of an attack.’ Can’t do that!”

“Actions should be taken immediately against Milley,” Trump said.

According to the book,

Milley told his counterpart in the first call, “General Li, I want to assure you that the American government is stable and everything is going to be okay. We are not going to attack or conduct any kinetic operations against you.”

“If we’re going to attack, I’m going to call you ahead of time. It’s not going to be a surprise,” Milley reportedly said.

A senior defense official, speaking after the conversations were described in excerpts from the book, said that Milley’s message to Li on both occasions was one of reassurance. The official questioned suggestions that Milley told Li he would call him first, and instead said the chairman made the point that the U.S. was not going to suddenly attack China without any warning — whether it be through diplomatic, administrative or military channels.

Milley also spoke with a number of other chiefs of defense around the world in the days after the Jan. 6 riot, including military leaders from the United Kingdom, Russia and Pakistan. A read-out of those calls in January referred to “several” other counterparts that he spoke to with similar messages of reassurance that the U.S. government was strong and in control.

The second call was meant to placate Chinese fears about the events of Jan. 6. But the book reports that Li wasn’t as easily assuaged, even after Milley promised him: “We are 100 percent steady. Everything’s fine. But democracy can be sloppy sometimes.”

Milley believed the presi-

dent suffered a mental decline after the election, agreeing with a view shared by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in a phone call they had Jan. 8, according to officials.

Pelosi had previously said she spoke to Milley that day about “available precautions” to prevent Trump from initiating military action or ordering a nuclear launch, and she told colleagues she was given unspecified assurances that there were longstanding safeguards in place.

Milley, according to the book, called the admiral overseeing the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, the military unit responsible for Asia and the Pacific region, and recommended postponing upcoming military exercises. He also asked senior officers to swear an “oath” that Milley had to be involved if Trump gave an order to launch nuclear weapons, according to the book.

Officials in January and on Tuesday confirmed that Milley spoke with Pelosi, which was made public by the House speaker at the time. The officials said the two talked about the existing, long-held safeguards in the process for a nuclear strike. One official said Tuesday that Milley’s intent in speaking with his staff and commanders about the process was not a move to subvert the president or his power, but to reaffirm the procedures and ensure they were understood by everyone.

It’s not clear what, if any, military exercises were actually postponed. But defense officials said it is more likely that the military postponed a planned operation, such as a freedom of naviga-

tion transit by a U.S. Navy ship in the Pacific region. The defense officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Milley was appointed by Trump in 2018 and later drew the president’s wrath when he expressed regret for participating in a June 2020 photo op with Trump after federal law enforcement cleared a park near the White House of peaceful protesters so Trump could stand at a nearby damaged church.

In response to the book, Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., sent President Joe Biden a letter Tuesday urging him to fire Milley, saying the general worked to “actively undermine the sitting Commander in Chief.”

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, called the report “deeply concerning,” telling reporters at the Capitol, “I think the first step is for General Milley to answer the question as to what exactly he said.”

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said he had no concerns that Milley might have exceeded his authority, telling reporters that Democratic lawmakers “were circumspect in our language, but many of us made it clear that we were counting on him to avoid the disaster which we knew could happen at any moment.”

A spokesperson for the Joint Staff declined to comment.

Milley’s second warning to Beijing came after Trump had fired Defense Secretary Mark Esper and filled several top positions with interim officeholders who were loyal to him.

# Newsom crushes recall effort in Calif.

*Associated Press*

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Despite warnings the race would be close, California Gov. Gavin Newsom decisively defeated efforts to kick him out of office, a win the Democrat cast as an endorsement of his handling of the coronavirus pandemic and his party's liberal values.

Newsom cruised to victory in the recall election Tuesday, boosted by healthy turnout among an overwhelmingly Democratic electorate, ensuring the nation's most populous state will remain a laboratory for progressive policies.

With an estimated two-thirds of ballots counted, the "no" response to the question of whether to recall Newsom was ahead by a 30-point margin. That lead was built on votes cast by mail and in advance of Tuesday's in-

person balloting. While likely to shrink somewhat in the days ahead as votes cast at polling places are counted, Newsom's lead couldn't be overcome.

"No' is not the only thing that was expressed tonight," Newsom said. "I want to focus on what we said 'yes' to as a state: We said yes to science, we said yes to vaccines, we said yes to ending this pandemic."

Republican talk radio host Larry Elder almost certainly would have replaced Newsom had the recall succeeded.

The recall turned on Newsom's approach to the pandemic, including mask and vaccine mandates, and Democrats cheered the outcome as evidence voters approve of their strategy. The race also was a test of whether opposition to former President Donald Trump and his

brand of conservative politics remains a motivating force for Democrats and independents, as the party looks ahead to midterm elections next year.

Republicans had hoped for proof that frustrations over months of pandemic precautions would drive voters away from Democrats. The GOP won back four U.S. House seats last year, success that Republican leaders had hoped indicated revived signs of life in a state controlled by Democrats for more than a decade. But a recall election is an imperfect barometer — particularly of national trends. Democrats outnumber Republicans nearly 2-to-1 in California, so the results may not translate to governors in toss-up states or reflect how voters will judge members of Congress next year.

Trump, who had largely

stayed out of the contest, made unsubstantiated claims that the election was rigged in the closing days that were echoed by Elder's campaign. Elder did not mention fraud as he addressed his supporters after the results were in — while hinting his first campaign may not be his last.

"Let's be gracious in defeat. We may have lost the battle, but we are going to win the war," he said, later adding that the recall has forced Democrats to focus on issues such as homelessness and California's high cost of living.

Newsom became the second governor in U.S. history to defeat a recall, cementing him as a prominent figure in Democratic politics and preserving his prospects for a future run. Republican Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker also survived a recall in 2012.

## Senate Republicans blast Afghanistan withdrawal

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

Republicans on the Senate Armed Services Committee castigated President Joe Biden's decision to pull U.S. forces from Afghanistan and the chaotic withdrawal that followed after a closed hearing Tuesday with the last general to lead America's longest war.

Army Gen. Austin "Scott" Miller testified during the classified hearing Tuesday that he had advised against withdrawing all U.S. forces in Afghanistan, said Sen. Jim Inhofe, of Oklahoma, the top Republican on the committee. Inhofe told reporters that Miller delivered his recommendations to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Marine Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, his direct supervisor and commander of U.S. Central Command. Inhofe's comments

confirmed previous reports about Miller's recommendations.

Miller never met directly with Biden to provide his advice, Inhofe said during a short news briefing held along with eight other Republican members of the committee. The senators declined to provide any other specifics from the session with Miller, citing its secretive nature. Instead, they took turns admonishing Biden and his administration for their handling of the Afghanistan pullout.

"What we've seen in Afghanistan has been nothing short of a disaster," Inhofe said. "You've heard everybody say it over and over again. We're having a hard time finding words to properly describe it."

Sen. Deb Fischer, R-Neb., attempted to make such a description, saying the "withdrawal was chaotic. It was a blunder. It was disgraceful."

## Justice officials seek order against Texas abortion law

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department has asked a federal court in Texas to stop the enforcement of a new state law that bans most abortions in the state while it decides the case.

The Texas law, known as SB8, prohibits abortions once medical professionals can detect cardiac activity — usually around six weeks, before some women know they're pregnant. Courts have blocked other states from imposing similar restrictions, but Texas' law differs significantly because it leaves enforcement to private citizens through civil lawsuits instead of criminal prosecutors. The law went into effect earlier this month after the Supreme Court declined an emergency appeal from abortion providers asking that the law be stayed.

In Tuesday's emergency motion in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas,

Austin Division, the department said "a court may enter a temporary restraining order or a preliminary injunction as a means of preventing harm to the movant before the court can fully adjudicate the claims in dispute." Last week, the Justice Department filed a lawsuit in Texas asking a federal judge to declare that the law is invalid because it unlawfully infringes on the constitutional rights of women and violates the Supremacy Clause of the Constitution, which says federal law supersedes state law. The department made a similar argument in seeking the restraining order or temporary injunction, and said that its challenge would likely be successful.

Under the law, someone could bring a lawsuit — even if they have no connection to the woman getting an abortion — and could be entitled to at least \$10,000 in damages if they prevail in court.

# Nicholas crawls into La., dumping rain

Associated Press

POINTE-AUX-CHENES — Nicholas weakened to a tropical depression as it crawled from Texas into southern Louisiana on Wednesday, unleashing heavy rain across a landscape where Hurricane Ida destroyed thousands of rooftops now covered with flimsy tarps.

Forecasters said Nicholas would slow to a stall over central Louisiana through Thursday, with plenty of water still to dump east of its center, drenching the Gulf Coast as far as the western Florida Panhandle. Southeast Louisiana faced the biggest flooding threat, and Gov. John Bel Edwards warned people to take it seriously, even though Nicholas was no longer the hurricane that made landfall in Texas on Tuesday.

“This is a very serious storm, particularly in those areas that were so heavily impacted by Hurricane Ida,” Edwards said.

Forecasters warned people along the central Gulf Coast that up to 20 inches are possible through Friday in places across a region still recovering from Category 4 hurricanes — Ida weeks ago and Laura last year.

Galveston, Texas, recorded nearly 14 inches of rain from Nicholas, the 14th named storm of the 2021 Atlantic hurricane season, while Houston reported more than 6 inches. The New Orleans office of the National Weather Service said late Tuesday that as much as 10 inches of rain could fall in parts of Louisiana, with some areas seeing particularly intense periods of 2 to 3

inches of rainfall per hour.

In the small Louisiana community of Pointe-aux-Chenes, Ida peeled open the tin roof of Terry and Patti Dardar’s home, leaving them without power and water for more than two weeks since. Nicholas made the damage that much worse, soaking the upstairs. But it also provided them with badly needed water, which their son Terren and grandchildren collected in jugs and poured into a huge plastic container through a strainer. From there, a pump powered by a generator brought the water inside.

His mom, Patti, said the family didn’t have anywhere else to go after Ida, so members were doing their best during Nicholas.

“We ain’t got no other place,” she said. “This is our home.”

## Democrats try delicate tax maneuvers for \$3.5T bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Democrats began the serious work of trying to implement President Joe Biden’s expansive spending plan, but getting there will require remarkable legislative nimbleness, since Biden has said the revenue to pay for it must come only from Americans who earn more than \$400,000 a year.

Republicans, who have vowed lockstep opposition to the plan, turned their anger against proposed tax breaks they portrayed as subsidies for wealthy elites rather than help for the poor and middle class. Electric vehicles became a rallying symbol as class-warfare overtones echoed through a committee session.

The Democrats are proposing that the top

tax rate rise back to 39.6% on individuals earning more than \$400,000 — or \$450,000 for couples — in addition to a 3% surtax on wealthier Americans with adjusted income beyond \$5 million a year. For big business, the proposal would lift the corporate tax rate from 21% to 26.5% on companies’ annual income over \$5 million.

“Look, I don’t want to punish anyone’s success, but the wealthy have been getting a free ride at the expense of the middle class for too long,” Biden tweeted Tuesday. “I intend to pass one of the biggest middle class tax cuts ever — paid for by making those at the top pay their fair share.”

The reach for revenue from the wealthy was even billboarded at the ultra-chic Met Gala in Manhattan on Monday night. Rep.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., a leading House progressive, wore a white gown with “Tax the Rich” in giant red letters emblazoned on the back (designer Aurora James).

For middle- and low-income people, tax help, not increase, is on offer as the House Ways and Means Committee digs into debate and drafting of tax proposals to both fund and buttress Biden’s ambitious \$3.5 trillion rebuilding plan that includes spending for child care, health care, education and tackling climate change.

It’s an opening bid at a daunting moment for Biden and his allies in Congress as they assemble the “Build Back Better” package considered by some on par with the Great Society of the 1960s or even the New Deal of the 1930s Depression.

## Fires shut Sequoia National Park, could threaten trees

Associated Press

SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK, Calif. — Sequoia National Park is shut down, as its namesake gigantic trees are potentially threatened by two forest fires burning in steep and dangerous terrain in California’s Sierra Nevada.

Both fires were projected to advance in the direction of Giant Forest, home to more than 2,000 giant sequoias including the General Sherman Tree, which is the largest tree on Earth by volume.

The massive sequoias grow on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada. The General

Sherman Tree stands 275 feet and is over 36 feet in diameter at the base, according to the U.S. National Park Service.

“There’s no imminent threat to Giant Forest, but that is a potential,” Mark Ruggiero, fire information officer for Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks, said Tuesday.

Ruggiero estimated that the closest flames were about a mile from the grove. Sequoia headquarters personnel, about 75 people, were being evacuated, he said.

The Colony and Paradise fires, named for locations where they started, were ignited by lightning last week and were being bat-

tled collectively under the name of the KNP Complex. Their combined sizes grew to more than nine square miles late Tuesday, with fire jumping over the Generals Highway.

All park facilities were already closed and wilderness trailhead permits had been canceled. The Silver City retreat and the summer cabins of Cabin Cove were under evacuation orders. Part of the community of Three Rivers outside the park entrance was under an evacuation warning.

Kings Canyon National Park, to the north of Sequoia, remained open.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Police: 70-year-old man attacked a noisy child**

**FL** CLEARWATER — A 70-year-old man has been accused of slamming a child to the ground at a Florida playground after yelling that kids were making too much noise.

Police arrested the man on a child abuse charge in Clearwater and took him to the Pinellas County Jail, arrest records show.

Officials said there were several kids playing at the playground about 6:30 p.m. Saturday when the man stormed out of his apartment annoyed over the noise.

WTSP reported the man picked up a 10-year-old child by the shirt and slammed the kid to the ground. Officials say the child was not seriously hurt.

**Judge suspends tougher deadly force standards**

**MN** ST. PAUL — A judge has suspended Minnesota’s new stricter standards on when police can use deadly force, halting a change in state law that followed the death of George Floyd while in custody of Minneapolis police.

The new standards, passed by the Legislature in 2020, raised the bar on officers to justify in specific terms how their actions involving lethal force were necessary.

Several law enforcement lobbying groups filed a legal challenge to get the law tossed out or at least suspended until more officers could be trained on the new expectations.

Ramsey County Judge Leonardo Castro on Monday ruled

that the changes to the law will be put on hold until the lawsuit is complete and that the use of force conditions will revert to those that were in place before the new law went into effect in March. Castro said oral arguments will take place within 60 days, the Star Tribune reported.

**Man dies after car hits county welcome sign**

**SC** RICHBURG — A North Carolina man died after his van ran off Interstate 77 in South Carolina and hit a brick welcome sign for Chester County, authorities said.

Gregory Morris Hill, 70, of Charlotte, N.C., died at the scene of the crash Monday afternoon, Chester County Coroner Terry Tinker said.

Hill’s van was heading south on I-77 when it ran off the right side of the highway and into the “Welcome to Chester County” sign at Exit 65, South Carolina Highway Patrol Cpl. Joe Hovis said.

**Former von Bulow mansion sells for \$30M**

**RI** NEWPORT — A Rhode Island estate once famously owned by Claus and Martha von Bulow has sold for \$30 million.

Clarendon Court on Newport’s famed Bellevue Avenue mansion row was sold late Thursday, the Newport Daily News reported. The buyer’s name wasn’t disclosed. The grand estate on more than seven acres with sweeping ocean views was built in 1904 by the architect Horace Trumbauer, the newspaper reported.

The sale easily tops the \$17.75

million paid by singer Taylor Swift in 2013 for her home in Westerly, which is considered the highest price fetched by a home in the state, according to the Newport Daily News.

Clarendon Court was where heiress Martha “Sunny” von Bulow slipped into a coma in 1980 from which she never woke up.

Claus Von Bulow, a Danish-born socialite, was convicted but later acquitted of trying to kill her to gain her fortune so he could live with his soap opera actress mistress.

**Ex-tax official sentenced in embezzlement case**

**NM** BERNALILLO — A former head of the New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department has been sentenced to five years of probation for her convictions in an embezzlement case.

A state District Court judge for Sandoval County last week sentenced former Secretary Demesia Padilla on her June jury convictions for embezzlement and computer access with intent to defraud or embezzle.

Padilla faced up to 18 years in prison, but Judge Cindy Mercer suspended all prison time for Padilla and imposed five years of supervised probation, the Albuquerque Journal reported.

**Psychiatric hospital patient steals truck**

**WA** STEILACOOM — A Western State Hospital patient stole a delivery truck and drove off the grounds of the state’s largest psychiatric hospital Sunday, injuring a hospital staffer before being found at a school library, according to

police and state officials.

“The patient got into the truck with the keys in it and drove the truck through a large gate and off the campus,” said Lt. Chris Lawler, a spokesperson for the Lakewood Police Department.

The patient “didn’t try very hard to evade capture” and was located by the hospital’s security team before police officers arrived, he said.

The Seattle Times reported that the patient ended up at Steilacoom High School, where he was found in the school’s library and returned to Western, said Chris Wright, a spokesperson for the Department of Social and Health Services, which operates the hospital.

A hospital staffer was injured after falling off the truck and was hospitalized, Wright said.

**Sept. 11 monument defaced by vandals**

**SC** GREENVILLE — A large granite monument of the twin towers was defaced by vandals who spray-painted “Taliban” on it in two places, authorities said.

The granite statue is made of two towers, each weighing 4,000 pounds with a light beam outside a Greenville County business, WYFF-TV reported.

Deputies were called to investigate the vandalism Sunday morning and the damage was cleaned up later that day, said Paul Nichols, founder and CEO of Upstate Granite Solutions.

His granite company constructed the memorial, which is surrounded by 1,000 American flags, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terror attacks on the U.S.

— From wire services



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# Loss complicates Buckeyes' playoff path

Associated Press

Perennial powerhouse Ohio State is not accustomed to losing games during the regular season. The Buckeyes especially aren't used to losing in September to two-touchdown underdogs, which happened last week.

So how will the Buckeyes, who dropped from No. 3 to No. 9 in the AP Top 25, respond?

"I know no one is used to losing or anything like that but, you know, we've just got to move on, make corrections," coach Ryan Day said Tuesday. "The sun came up, and we're going to go from there. It's nothing that different guys haven't felt before. They've lost games before."

But not too often around here.

Before major defensive lapses led to Saturday's strange 35-28 loss to Oregon, Ohio State hadn't let a regular-season game slip away since 2018, and hadn't lost one at home since 2017.

Day says much can be learned from the setback about players, as well as about the team's supporters, some of whom are quick to get surly when the Buckeyes fail.

"You find out a lot about a lot of people when adversity hits," he said. "You find out about their true character."

As Day noted after the game, one loss isn't fatal to Ohio State's bid to make the College Football Playoff — anything less would be considered a failure in Columbus — but it makes it a little harder and more complicated.

Take 2018, when the No. 2 Buckeyes lost to unranked Purdue in October. They won the rest and the Big Ten title but were outside looking in when playoff selections were announced.

In 2017, Baker Mayfield brazenly tried to plant an Oklahoma flag in the Ohio Stadium artificial turf after the Sooners prevailed 31-16 in Week 2. A head-scratching loss to Iowa followed two months later. Ohio State won the Big Ten title, but had to settle for the Cotton Bowl and a No. 5 ranking.

Any loss these days by the storied program causes turmoil inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. Issues with the Buckeyes defense must be cleaned up fast. The offense has to get more balanced. Schemes will be dissected, personnel evaluated and assistant coaches upbraided.

Fortunately for Ohio State, the next two weeks bring Tulsa and Akron to Columbus for tuneup games of the kind that typically are scheduled to open the season. Blowout wins — Tulsa is a 27-point underdog Satur-

day — aren't going to impress poll voters but more game reps should help work out some of the problems.

The team resumes Big Ten play on the road against Rutgers on Oct. 2. Big ones ahead include No. 10 Penn State at home on Oct. 30 and No. 25 Michigan at Ann Arbor on Nov. 27.

Indiana and Michigan State could end up being trouble, too.

Fifth-year defensive tackle Haskell Garrett insisted that all the Buckeyes' goals are still attainable, noting that Ohio State's 2014 team lost to Virginia Tech at home in Week 2 but rebounded to run the table and win the national championship.

"We're going to get on the film, make the proper corrections, we're going to put it behind us and then go play the next game," Garrett said. "It is what it is. They did it in '14. We can do it in 2021."

C.J. Stroud, the 19-year-old quarterback whose first collegiate start was the Sept. 2 win over Minnesota, said he and his teammates are keeping level heads.

"Haskell came up after the game and he said something great: 'The season's not over.'" Stroud said. "We're not going to press, we're going to stick together. We're not going to point fingers."

## USC players saddened by the firing of Helton

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Clay Helton's players hate the fact their head coach's firing was a cause for celebration for much of Southern California's vast football fan base.

When those players went back to work Tuesday night, Helton's sudden departure was a cause for mourning and reflection — and a renewed determination to make him proud.

"It hurt, for sure," veteran safety Isaiah Pola-Mao said. "Coach has always had a huge impact on me. I signed here with him in mind. We wanted him to be the next Pete Carroll. We wanted to lift him up, and for him to be great. Of course, things don't go our way."

At the high-pressure level of college football inhabited by USC, it's sometimes easy to for-

get the vast majority of Helton's players decidedly do not share the profound dislike of their coach that practically every vocal fan of the Trojans seems to hold.

Thousands of people chanted for Helton's firing last Saturday night at the Coliseum during USC's embarrassing loss to Stanford. Many of those same people welcomed athletic director Mike Bohn's decision Monday with on-line glee — and the players saw it.

Many of the people who had daily interactions with Helton on campus and in the locker room still revere him as a mentor and a father figure to his players. Many of those players still haven't processed the fact they must continue a long season without the coach who recruited them and embraced the responsibility of

fostering their development into well-rounded adults.

"It was heart-wrenching for a lot of us," receiver Drake London said. "He's such a good man to us, on and off the field. It was sad to see him go."

One day after Helton's seven-season tenure ended with his firing, the Trojans (1-1, 0-1 Pac-12) held their usual opening practice of game week on campus. USC visits Washington State for its road opener on Saturday with Donte Williams as interim head coach.

USC only allowed three team captains to speak with reporters after practice, but Bohn and Williams both spoke at length about the challenges ahead after changing leadership only two games into a season.

"For young people, sudden change is very, very difficult, and

it's really difficult for all of us," Bohn said. "I have tremendous respect for Clay Helton as a coach and a man."

Helton and Bohn jointly broke the news to the team Monday. Bohn said Williams will run the Trojans with his big-picture motivational skills, while coordinators Graham Harrell and Todd Orlando will handle most of the game planning, as they did under Helton.

"It happened pretty quick," punter Ben Griffiths said. "But it was nice to have that time. ... We understand as players we've got a job to do, and that's to finish off this season."

Bohn revealed nothing new about the reasons for the unusual timing of his decision on Helton, who had won nine straight regular-season games before the Stanford blowout.

# QBs skipping preseason had mixed results

Associated Press

Sitting out the preseason did nothing to slow the start to the season for guys like Matthew Stafford, Russell Wilson and Dak Prescott.

For guys like Aaron Rodgers, Ryan Tannehill and Matt Ryan, there appeared to be some rust.

In all, nine quarterbacks who didn't take a snap in the preseason started Week 1, and there was no consistent pattern on whether that decision helped or hurt.

Four of the nine quarterbacks ended up on the winning side, with Wilson's Seahawks beating Carson Wentz's Colts in the only game featuring two starting QBs who sat out the preseason. The combined 95.2 passer rating for the quarterbacks was slightly lower than the league average of 99.6.

Perhaps the most impressive performance came from Stafford, who went 20-for-26 for 321 yards and three TDs in a win against Chicago in his debut with the Rams. The 156.1 passer rating was the highest ever in Week 1 for a player on a new team, as the lack of preseason work didn't seem to have a negative impact.

Dallas' Prescott and Las Vegas' Derek Carr each threw for more than 400 yards

in the opener, with Prescott losing to the Buccaneers and Carr leading a wild comeback for a 33-27 overtime win against Baltimore thanks to a walk-off 31-yard TD pass to Zay Jones.

Wilson had four TDs and no interceptions in his first game under new play-caller Shane Waldron. His 11 games with at least four TDs and no interceptions are the seventh-most ever.

On the other side was Rodgers, who went 15-for-28 for 133 yards and two interceptions in a 38-3 loss to New Orleans for a 36.8 passer rating that was the lowest ever for a reigning NFL MVP in Week 1.

He even threw a red zone interception for the first time since Oct. 14, 2019, against Detroit, ending a streak of 50 TD passes in the red zone without an interception, including the playoffs.

Ryan and Tannehill struggled in new offenses after sitting out the preseason, with Ryan throwing for only 164 yards in a 32-6 loss to Philadelphia in his first game with Arthur Smith as coach in Atlanta.

Tannehill missed Arthur Smith, his former offensive coordinator, in Tennessee's opener against Arizona. He went 21-for-35 for 210 yards with a TD, an interception and six sacks in his first game

with Todd Downing as offensive coordinator.

## West is best

The eight teams in the West divisions all won their openers this season. This marked the first time since the merger that every team in two separate divisions won every game in the same week.

Since the current eight-division format started in 2002, this marked the third and fourth times that a division went 4-0 in Week 1, with the AFC West doing it in 2002 and the AFC East in 2015.

The NFC West was more dominant with the 65-point combined margin of victory compared to plus-28 for the AFC West.

On the other side of the equation was the NFC North, whose teams went 0-4 and got outscored by 66 points.

## Go for it

Fourth-down aggressiveness for coaches keeps increasing, with the 52 attempts being the second-most ever in a week dating to 1991.

The 33 fourth-down attempts in the first three quarters were the most in any week as far as SportRadar records go back to in 2000. Teams converted 18 of those tries.

# Jets PK Ammendola has stunning debut as pinch-hit punter

Associated Press

NEW YORK— Matt Ammendola caught the snap, booted the ball with his right leg and sent it soaring downfield 50 yards.

Not a bad punt, right?

Well, the fact the New York Jets rookie placekicker hadn't previously attempted a punt in a game — not college, not high school, not ever — made it even more impressive. And because of an injury to punter Braden Mann, Ammendola had to handle those duties the rest of the game and finished with a solid 48.5-yard average.

"I've actually never punted, which is the craziest thing," a smiling Ammendola said. "It was a whirlwind, just kind of going in there. You never want to see a teammate go down, especially my punter, my holder.

"But, you know, sometimes you've just kind of got to step in

and just go about it."

Mann sprained his left knee — his plant leg — when he was rolled into during his first punt in the first quarter of New York's 19-14 loss at Carolina on Sunday. With the punter done for the day and wearing a heavy brace on his leg, the Jets turned to Ammendola.

And he did more than just fill in. He was stunningly solid.

His second punt traveled an eye-widening 65 yards.

"Kind of surreal," Ammendola said.

Next came kicks of 46, 37, 57 and 42 yards, helping keep the Jets out of potentially awful field position throughout the day. In a weird twist, Ammendola never got a chance to try a field goal or extra point — the main reason he's on the team, of course — in his NFL debut.

"Terrific job by him," coach

Robert Saleh said. "I thought he punted the heck out of it for not really practicing it. Showed no pale face or anything. Just stepped right in and did a really good job. Hats off to him. Wish we could have got him a field goal opportunity in there somewhere, but thought he did a great job."

The punting gig was just a temporary thing, though, for the strong-legged, 24-year-old Ammendola. With Mann placed on injured reserve and expected to be sidelined four to six weeks, New York signed veteran punter Thomas Morstead, rather than have Ammendola pull double duty again.

Not that he would be opposed to it. But he wouldn't necessarily call himself an NFL-caliber punter. Not yet, anyway.

"It definitely takes a lot to be an NFL specialist, for sure, especially a punter," Ammendola

said. "Consistency is probably the word I'd use as far as being a punter. I definitely think if I could really focus just on punting in the offseason, maybe over time, within a few years. But, no, I don't think I could do it right just this second.

"Obviously, if need be, I'll go out there and do my best like I did (Sunday), but that's about all I can say."

The 35-year-old Morstead played 12 seasons in New Orleans and has a 46.5-yard career average, but was cut by the Saints in March. He'll fill in for the Jets in Mann's absence.

Ammendola made it to the NFL on the power of his right leg and, particularly, his ability to kick field goals and extra points.

The Lansdale, Pa., native set the North Penn High School record with a 56-yard field goal as a junior.

# Dodgers clinch playoff spot

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles Dodgers are chasing the San Francisco Giants in the NL West. They caught their rival in one big way by becoming the second team in the majors to clinch a postseason berth.

Max Muncy, Trea Turner and Will Smith homered in an 8-4 victory over the Arizona Diamondbacks on Tuesday night that was their fifth in a row.

The Giants locked up a postseason spot a night earlier. The Dodgers secured their ninth straight playoff appearance with an eighth straight home win and help from Cincinnati and San Diego, which both lost. The defending World Series champions got it done at home, where their 51-23 record leads the majors.

“It’s definitely something that shouldn’t be

taken for granted,” third baseman Justin Turner said. “At the same time, our focus is on us and taking care of what’s in front of us.”

San Francisco partied after making the postseason for the first time in five years. Los Angeles kept things low key.

“We did a little champagne toast, said a few words and acknowledged the fact that it’s a big accomplishment,” said manager Dave Roberts, wearing a blue “Built for October” T-shirt. “We got a lot of work to do and this is just the beginning.”

The Dodgers finally have their full rotation — led by Cy Young Award contenders Walker Buehler, Max Scherzer and Julio Urías — in place after numerous injuries.

“You win with starting pitching and I believe we have the best starting pitching in

baseball,” Roberts said. “I love where we’re at.”

Tony Gonsolin (3-1) scattered two hits over five scoreless innings, struck out six and walked two.

“I’ve been kind of grinding with the team the whole year,” Gonsolin said, “but being able to contribute makes me feel a lot better.”

Using teammate Albert Pujols’ bat, Muncy hit his 33rd homer, a two-run shot, off Luke Weaver (3-5) in the third, when the D-backs had two errors. Mookie Betts singled leading off and scored, making it 3-0. Will Smith grounded into a fielder’s choice to Weaver, who botched the throw, allowing Corey Seager to score after reaching on a fielding error by Ketel Marte. Weaver bent over and stomped his feet in frustration as the Dodgers led 4-0.

## Schwarber’s 3-run double lifts Red Sox past Mariners

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Pinch-hitter Kyle Schwarber hit a tiebreaking three-run double in the eighth inning and the Boston Red Sox beat the Seattle Mariners 8-4 on Tuesday night to keep pace in the competitive AL wild-card race.

Schwarber, out of the lineup in favor of Alex Verdugo, entered against reliever Drew Steckenrider with one out in the eighth and the bases loaded. His double to right ended a tense standoff with the Mariners, who beat the Red Sox 5-4 on Monday with the help of Schwarber’s fielding error.

Verdugo added a two-run home run in Boston’s next at-bat against Yohan Ramirez.

The victory kept the Red Sox percentage points behind the New York Yankees and Toronto Blue Jays for the AL’s two wild-card spots. Seattle dropped to three games back.

**Rays 2, Blue Jays 0:** Drew Rasmussen combined with four relievers on a three-hitter, Brandon Lowe and Ji-Man Choi homered and visiting Tampa Bay became the first AL team to reach 90 wins.

After losing four of their previous five, the East-leading Rays (0-55) hit the 90-win mark for the eighth time — all in the past 14 seasons.

**Giants 6, Padres 1:** Buster Posey homered in the first inning and scored the go-ahead run on an error in the third, and host San Francisco beat San Diego for its ninth straight victory a day after becoming the first team in the big leagues to clinch a playoff berth.

With nine straight wins, the Giants have their longest winning streak since a 10-game unbeaten run from May 20-31, 2004.

**Yankees 7, Orioles 2:** Aaron Judge started a five-homer barrage that backed Gerrit Cole, and New York won at Baltimore, winning consecutive games for the first time since Sept. 1 and 3.

Cole (15-7) returned from left hamstring tightness that cut short his Sept. 7 start against Toronto. He stranded the bases loaded in a 29-pitch first inning when he struck out Ramón Urias and allowed one run and four hits in five innings with seven strikeouts and three walks.

**Rockies 5, Braves 4:** Bren-

dan Rodgers hit a tiebreaking, two-run homer in the fifth inning, Trevor Story went deep in the second and Colorado held on to win at Atlanta.

Jon Gray pitched five innings as the Rockies moved to 22-51 on the road coming off a four-game series win at Philadelphia. Carlos Estévez earned his eighth save in 13 chances.

**White Sox 9, Angels 3:** Rookie Gavin Sheets hit a long three-run homer and had four RBIs in his first three-hit game, and Chicago beat Los Angeles in Joe Maddon’s first game back in the Windy City.

**Pirates 6, Reds 5:** Wade Miley surrendered six runs on 10 hits and visiting Cincinnati lost for the sixth time in eight games.

**Rangers 8, Astros 1:** All-Star slugger Adolis García tied Texas’ single-season rookie record with his 30th homer, one of three long balls allowed by visiting Houston pitcher Zack Greinke in his return after testing positive for COVID-19.

**Cardinals 7, Mets 6 (11):** Edmundo Sosa hit the go-ahead single in a three-run 11th inning and St. Louis climbed all the way

back into playoff position with a win at New York.

**Tigers 1, Brewers 0 (11):** Derek Hill hit a leadoff RBI double in the 11th inning as host Detroit ended Milwaukee’s five-game winning streak.

**Royals 10, Athletics 7:** Salvador Perez hit a go-ahead three-run homer in the sixth inning, the bullpen bailed out starter Jackson Kowar and host Kansas City rallied from an early six-run hole to beat Oakland.

**Indians 3-3, Twins 1-6:** Cleveland’s Triston McKenzie cruised through six innings of the first game of a doubleheader to beat host Minnesota when a comebacker off the wrist of rookie Joe Ryan shortened the pitching duel.

Ryan Jeffers had four RBIs in the nightcap as the Twins gained a split.

**Cubs 6, Phillies 3:** Patrick Wisdom and Alfonso Rivas hit back-to-back homers for Chicago in a win at Philadelphia.

**Nationals 8, Marlins 2:** Ryan Zimmerman homered, Erick Fedde pitched five solid innings and host Washington pounded out 14 hits in winning for the second time in three games.