

Pentagon: Kabul strike a 'tragic mistake'

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Ten civilians, including seven children, were killed in the Aug. 29 drone strike in Kabul that military leaders had said destroyed a car filled with explosives driven by an Islamic State terrorist, the top U.S. general in the Middle East said Friday.

"The strike was a tragic mistake," said Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, commander of U.S. Central Command.

McKenzie said it is unlikely any ISIS terrorists were killed in the strike and they are considering reparations for the families of the victims.

CENTCOM recently opened a high-level command investigation and a civilian casualty assessment into that strike after The New York Times reported the strike conducted in the waning days of U.S. involvement in the Afghanistan war actually killed a local worker for a U.S.-based aid company and up to 10 nearby civilians.

The Reaper drone strike was the last known airstrike launched by American forces in Afghanistan before the final U.S. troops pulled out of Kabul just before midnight Aug. 31. Defense officials in announcing the strike Aug. 29 said it had disrupted an imminent suicide attack against Hamid Karzai International Airport. The U.S. military

used the Kabul airfield to lead an about two-week effort to evacuate Americans and their allies, including Afghans, from the country after the Taliban takeover Aug. 15.

"I offer my profound condolences to the family and friends of those who are killed," McKenzie said. "This strike was taken in earnest belief that it would prevent an imminent threat to our forces and the evacuees at the airport, but it was a mistake. And I offer my sincere apology. As the combatant commander, I am fully responsible for this strike in this tragic outcome."

The drone strike came just days after a suicide bomber with ISIS-Khorasan — Afghanistan's ISIS affiliate known as ISIS-K — blew himself up just outside the airport, killing 13 American service members, wounding nearly two dozen more and killing and maiming hundreds of Afghans crowded around the airfield's gates. U.S. officials at that time were on high alert about the potential for another terrorist attack on the airport and warned publicly such an assault was likely imminent.

"We now know that there was no connection between [the local worker] and ISIS-Khorasan, that his activities on that day were completely harmless and not at all related to the imminent threat we believed we faced," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a prepared statement. "We apologize, and we will

endeavor to learn from this horrible mistake."

Austin announced he has directed a review of the investigation completed by CENTCOM.

"I have asked for this review to consider the degree to which the investigation considered all available context and information, the degree to which accountability measures need be taken and at what level, and the degree to which strike authorities, procedures and processes need to be altered in the future," he said.

A CENTCOM statement just after the strike claimed it caused secondary explosions, indicating explosives were inside the car. However, the investigation found the secondary explosion was caused by a propane tank located behind the white Toyota Corolla that was hit with a missile at about 4:51 p.m. on Aug. 29, McKenzie said.

"Clearly our intelligence was wrong on this particular white Toyota Corolla," he said.

Intelligence gathered by U.S. personnel led the military to a vehicle of that make and model as a key element of the next attack, and this particular Corolla was at a location of interest, the general said. It's now known that the compound included offices of Nutrition and Education International, a nonprofit based in California that works to fight malnutrition in places such as Afghanistan.

Afghan survivors of strike say sorry 'is not enough'

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Sorry is not enough for the Afghan survivors of an errant U.S. drone strike that killed 10 members of their family, including seven children.

Emal Ahmadi, whose 3-year-old daughter Malika was killed on Aug. 29, when the U.S. hellfire missile struck his elder brother's car, told The Associated Press on Saturday that the family demands Washington investigate who fired the drone and punish the military personnel responsible for the strike.

"That is not enough for us to say sorry," Ahmadi said. "The U.S.A. should find the person who did this."

Ahmadi said the family is also seeking

financial compensation for their losses and demanded that several members of the family be relocated to a third country, without specifying which country.

The AP and other news organizations in Kabul reported after the strike that the driver of the targeted vehicle, Zemerai Ahmadi, was a longtime employee at an American humanitarian organization and cited an absence of evidence to support the Pentagon's assertion that the vehicle contained explosives.

The missile struck as the car was pulling into the family's driveway and the children ran to greet Zemerai.

On Friday, U.S. Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command, called the strike a "tragic mis-

take," and after weeks of denials, said that innocent civilians were indeed killed in the attack and not an Islamic State extremist as was announced earlier.

McKenzie apologized for the error and said the United States is considering making reparation payments to the family of the victims.

Emal Ahmadi, who said he heard of the apology from friends in America, insisted that it won't bring back members of his family and while he expressed relief for the U.S. apology and recognition that his family were innocent victims, he said he was frustrated that it took weeks of pleading with Washington to at least make a call to the family.

US envoy: More flown out of Afghanistan

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — A Qatar Airways flight on Friday took more Americans out of Afghanistan, according to Washington's peace envoy, the third such airlift by the Mideast carrier since the Taliban takeover and the frantic U.S. troop pullout from the country.

The development came amid rising concerns over the future of Afghanistan under the Taliban. The country's new Islamic rulers on Friday ordered that boys but not girls from grades six to 12, and male teachers but no women teachers return to school and resume classes, starting Saturday.

The statement, posted on the Facebook page of the now Taliban-run education ministry, underscored fears that the Tali-

ban might again impose restrictions on girls and women. Since taking power, the Taliban had allowed girls in grades one to six to resume classes. When they ruled Afghanistan previously in the late 1990s, the Taliban banned girls and women from attending school and work.

U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad tweeted he was "grateful that more Americans were able to leave on a Qatar Airways flight." There was no immediate information on how many Americans were on the flight.

An Afghan official said more than 150 passengers were on the flight, though it was not immediately clear how many were Americans. In the past week, more than 300 foreign nationals as well as U.S. green card holders and Afghans with special vi-

sas have left Afghanistan. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

He said more flights were expected on Saturday, including another Qatar Airways flight. It's unclear how many American nationals are still in Afghanistan, but Khalilzad tweeted "we remain committed to get them out if they want to come home."

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jolina Porter confirmed that the plane departed Kabul on Friday and told reporters that officials were still trying to determine how many Americans, green card holders or holders of special immigrant visas for Afghans were on the flight heading to Doha, the Qatari capital.

After Afghan exit, US seeks NATO basing, intel pacts

Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece — Against the backdrop of the troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, the top U.S. military officer is meeting in Greece with NATO counterparts this weekend, hoping to forge more basing, intelligence sharing and other agreements to prevent terrorist groups from regrouping and threatening America and the region.

Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the meeting of NATO defense chiefs will focus in part on the way ahead now that all alliance troops have pulled out of Afghanistan and the Taliban are in control.

Milley, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and American intelligence officials have warned that al-Qaida or the Islamic State could regenerate in Afghanistan and pose a threat to the United States in one year to two years.

The U.S. military has said it can conduct counterterrorism surveillance and, if necessary, strikes in Afghanistan from "over

the horizon" — meaning from assets based in other countries. But they have made it clear that surveillance flights from bases in the Persian Gulf are long and provide limited time in the air over Afghanistan. So they have talked about seeking basing agreements, overflight rights and increased intelligence-sharing with nations closer to Afghanistan, including some neighbors.

In recent months, however, U.S. officials have reported little progress in any negotiations on any basing agreements.

Milly said he will be talking to his military counterparts "to see what the possibilities are and then bring them back" to U.S. defense and diplomatic leaders for additional discussions. Then, he said, officials will see what they can turn into a reality.

"We are going to talk about over the horizon capabilities and where allies think appropriate that they can make a contribution, we're certainly open to that," Milley told reporters traveling with him to Greece.

France recalls ambassadors to US, Australia on sub deal

Associated Press

PARIS — America's oldest ally, France, recalled its ambassador to the United States on Friday in an unprecedented show of anger that dwarfed decades of previous rifts.

The relationship conceived in 18th-century revolutions appeared at a tipping point after the U.S., Australia and Britain shunned France in creating a new Indo-Pacific security arrangement.

It was the first time ever France has recalled its ambassador to the U.S., according to the French foreign ministry. Paris also recalled its envoy to Australia.

Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said in a written statement that the French decision, on request from President Emmanuel Macron, "is justified by the exceptional seriousness of the announcements" made by Australia and the United States.

He said Australia's decision to scrap a big French conventional submarine purchase in favor of

nuclear subs built with U.S. technology is "unacceptable behavior between allies and partners."

Ambassador Philippe Etienne tweeted the announcements are "directly affecting the vision we have of our alliances, of our partnerships and of the importance of the Indo-Pacific for Europe."

"We understand their position and will continue to be engaged in the coming days to resolve our differences, as we have done at other points over the course of our long alliance," National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne said in a statement.

The Australian government said it regretted France's decision to recall its ambassador to that nation.

"Australia understands France's deep disappointment with our decision, which was taken in accordance with our clear and communicated national security interests," Foreign Minister Marise Payne's office said in a statement.

Top doctors pan Biden's booster shot plan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Just one month ago, President Joe Biden and his health advisers announced big plans to soon deliver a booster shot of the coronavirus vaccine to all Americans. But after campaigning for the White House on a pledge to “follow the science,” Biden found himself uncharacteristically ahead of it with that lofty pronouncement.

Some of nation's top medical advisers on Friday delivered a stinging rebuke of the idea, in essence telling the White House: not so fast.

A key government advisory panel overwhelmingly rejected Biden's plan to give COVID-19 booster shots across the board and instead recommended the extra vaccine dose only for those who are age 65 or older or who run a high risk of severe disease.

Biden's Aug. 18 announcement that the federal government was preparing to shore

up nearly all Americans' protection had been made with great fanfare. It was meant to calm the nerves of millions of Americans fearful of a new, more transmissible strain of the coronavirus.

“The plan is for every adult to get a booster shot eight months after you got your second shot,” Biden said, noting that his administration would be ready to begin the program on Sept. 20.

Biden added the qualification that third doses would require the signoff of health officials at the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but his public message glossed over the nuance.

“Just remember,” he said, “as a simple rule: Eight months after your second shot, get a booster shot.”

Biden's plan drew immediate outrage from global health groups that encouraged the United States and other well-off nations

to refrain from administering boosters until poorer countries could provide first doses to their most vulnerable citizens.

“Viewed from a global perspective, this is a squandering of a scarce global resource, as a consequence of which people will die,” said Dr. Peter Lurie, president of the Center for Science in the Public Interest. “I feel completely comfortable saying this,” he added, acknowledging that domestic political considerations weigh differently on presidents.

The Biden plan was criticized, too, by medical professionals, who cited a lack of safety data on extra doses and raised doubts about the value of mass boosters, rather than ones targeted to specific groups.

The nonbinding recommendation from the outside experts who advise the FDA is not the last word. The FDA will consider the group's advice and make its own decision, probably within days. The CDC is set to weigh in next week.

Federal agencies get guidance on vaccine mandate

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Federal employees can be fired for refusing to be vaccinated against the coronavirus, but as their disciplinary cases wind through the system, they will report to work alongside vaccinated colleagues, according to Biden administration guidance issued this week.

The new guidance to implement a vaccine mandate for the government, which President Joe Biden announced last week, represents a reversal of the strategy the White House coronavirus task force pushed in August for those employees without shots who refused under an earlier plan to get regular testing for covid-19.

Then, agencies were told they could place employees on administrative leave, a paid suspension used widely for short-term absences but also when a manager proposes

removing an employee.

“They seem like they decided to go with a harder approach,” said Jeff Friday, general counsel for the National Federation of Federal Employees, which has about 100,000 members at the Defense Department, U.S. Forest Service and other agencies.

“You're still going to have to work until you're let go,” Friday said. “Paid leave is certainly a disincentive to getting vaccinated.”

The rules on how to enforce the mandate were among several new details of what will be a complex, potentially messy process that will likely stretch deep into winter if not longer, given the government's sprawling size and presence in every state. The details will leave multiple groups of people following different rules in the same workplace.

In most agencies, for example, civil servants work side-by-side with employees

who work for federal contractors. But under the policy announced by the president last week, contractors who are not vaccinated must provide proof of a negative coronavirus test taken within three days before entering a federal facility — or enroll in a regular testing program.

Contractors, federal workers and visitors who show they are vaccinated are required to wear masks indoors in federal buildings located in areas of high or substantial viral transmission, but not in areas where transmission is lower.

Visitors must attest to their status before entering a federal building — although not if they are coming to receive benefits. Unvaccinated visitors or those who decline to provide their status also must provide proof of a negative test taken three days or sooner before coming into the building.

Alaska air base declares public health emergency

Associated Press

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — Military leaders on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson have declared a public health emergency and encouraged all personnel to avoid places that do not require masks or social distancing in response to increasing COVID-19 cases in Alaska, officials said.

“We've all seen COVID-19 cases continue to spread rapidly across our nation, the state of Alaska and in our local community,” U.S. Air Force Col. Kirsten Aguilar, 673d Air Base Wing and JBER commander, said in a statement Friday.

“After close consultation with JBER mission commanders, I have decided to declare a Public Health Emergency.”

Aguilar said the declaration will remain in effect for 30 days, but could be shortened or extended based on cases and community transmission of COVID-19.

The base has also transitioned to Health Protection Condition Bravo, which means Aguilar will be able to implement additional measures to protect against the spread of the coronavirus.

Crews on guard as fire nears sequoias

Associated Press

THREE RIVERS, Calif. — Crews were watching the weather this weekend as they battled California wildfires that have burned into some groves of gigantic ancient sequoias as they try to protect the world's largest tree.

The National Weather Service issued a weather watch for critical fire conditions in the Sequoia National Park in the Sierra Nevada, where the Colony Fire was burning about a mile from Giant Forest, a grove of 2,000 giant sequoias.

Firefighters have wrapped the base of the General Sherman Tree in fire-resistant aluminum of the type used in wildland firefighter emergency shelters and to protect historic wooden buildings, fire spokeswoman Rebecca Paterson said.

The General Sherman Tree is the largest in the world by volume, at 52,508 cubic feet, according to the National Park Service. It towers 275 feet high and has a circumference of 103 feet at ground level.

The Colony Fire is one of two lightning-caused blazes, known

together as the KNP Complex, that have burned about 18 square miles of forest land.

The fires forced the evacuation of the park this week, and parts of Three Rivers, a foothill community of about 2,500 people outside the park's main entrance. Crews have been bulldozing a line between the fire and the community.

Giant sequoias are adapted to fire, which can help them thrive by releasing seeds from their cones and creating clearings that allow young sequoias to grow. But the extraordinary in-

tensity of fires — fueled by climate change — can overwhelm the trees.

The fires already have burned into several groves containing trees as tall as 200 feet tall and 2,000 years old. They include Oriole Lake Grove in the national park and Peyrone North and South groves in the neighboring Sequoia National Forest.

Fire officials haven't yet been able to determine how much damage was done to the groves, which are in remote and hard-to-reach areas.

Police, media outnumber DC rally protesters

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In the shadow of a fortified Capitol, a few hundred demonstrators turned up Saturday for a rally to support those charged in January's riot, but were vastly outnumbered by the media and a heavy police presence.

U.S. Capitol Police were taking no chances, with hundreds of officers brought into Washington in an effort to avoid a repeat of the pre-inauguration attack. The fence around the Capitol was put back up, the city police force was fully activated

and Capitol Police requested assistance from the National Guard.

There were a few scuffles as the rally started, but no major incidents reported early on. Still, law enforcement officials remained on edge, concerned about the possibility of violent protesters and counterprotesters. Police were also preparing for the possibility that some demonstrators may arrive with weapons, though backpacks were allowed into the area and there were no checkpoints.

The rally was ringed by heavy

dump trucks and took place in fields far from the Capitol building. Law enforcement officers geared up at staging areas and metal barricades were placed around the streets. Inside the Capitol, police riot shields were placed near doors and windows, a stark difference from January, when officers inside were left without riot equipment and quickly overwhelmed as the crowd stormed inside.

Persistent attempts to rewrite the narrative of the violence and panic of Jan. 6, and the increasing volatility behind the lie that

the 2020 election was stolen, have made it impossible to predict what may happen this weekend. After all, law enforcement was only expecting a free speech protest the day Trump supporters stormed the Capitol in an effort to disrupt the certification of Joe Biden's victory.

Capitol Police Chief Tom Manger said at a news conference Friday it was difficult to say whether threats of violence at the event were credible, but "chatter" online and elsewhere has been similar to intelligence that was missed in January.

Photos reveal new North Korea uranium plant

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — Recent satellite images show North Korea is expanding a uranium enrichment plant at its main Yongbyon nuclear complex, a sign that it's intent on boosting the production of bomb materials, experts say.

The assessment comes after North Korea recently raised tensions with its first missile tests in six months amid long-dormant nuclear disarmament negotiations with the United States.

"The expansion of the enrichment plant probably indicates that North Korea plans to increase its production of weapons-grade

uranium at the Yongbyon site by as much as 25%," Jeffrey Lewis and two other experts at Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey said in a report.

The report said the photos taken by satellite imagery company Maxar showed construction in an area adjoining the uranium enrichment plant at Yongbyon.

It said a satellite image taken on Sept. 1 showed North Korea cleared trees and prepared the ground for construction, and that a construction excavator was also visible. The report said a second image taken on Sept. 14 showed a wall erected to enclose the area, work on a foundation and panels removed

from the side of the enrichment building to provide access to the newly enclosed area.

The new area is approximately 10,760 square feet, enough space to house 1,000 additional centrifuges, which would increase the plant's capacity to produce highly enriched uranium by 25%, the report said.

Nuclear weapons can be built using either highly enriched uranium or plutonium, and North Korea has facilities to produce both at Yongbyon. Last month, earlier satellite photos of Yongbyon showed signs that North Korea was resuming the operation of other facilities to produce weapons-grade plutonium.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man who died in custody after running nude ID'd

AZ PHOENIX — A man who was running through Phoenix streets naked before being restrained by police and then dying while in custody has been identified, authorities said.

Officers responding to reports of a man without clothes running north of downtown said they found Jesse Rickman, 28, acting erratically and making nonsensical statements.

Police said Rickman didn't comply with officers' attempts to get him out of the road and additional help was requested.

Rickman began to kick and spit as officers tried to contain him on the ground, prompting them to put him in handcuffs and apply a leg restraint as well as a spit mask over his head, police said.

As paramedics were rendering aid, police said Rickman became nonverbal and unresponsive. Rickman was taken to the hospital where he was later pronounced dead. Police said the cause of his death has not yet been determined.

Man pleads guilty after girlfriend buys him gun

NC ASHEVILLE — A man who was prohibited from buying a gun because of a prior conviction pleaded guilty to getting his girlfriend to buy one for him, a federal prosecutor in North Carolina said.

Travis Shaqwann Fair, 31, of Asheville went to a gun dealer in June 2019 and discussed buying a cheap gun with a store worker, Acting U.S. Attorney William T.

Stetzer said in a news release. Kourtney Nichelle Shivers, 29, of Asheville went to the same store to buy the gun for Fair, Stetzer said.

Fair pleaded guilty to illegal possession of a firearm. Shivers pleaded guilty to making a false statement in connection with purchasing a firearm.

City to get 1st female mayor of color in century

MA BOSTON — For the first time in 200 years, Boston voters have narrowed the field of mayoral candidates to two women of color who will face off against each other in November.

City Councilors Michelle Wu and Annissa Essaibi George topped the five-person race in the preliminary runoff. They bested acting Mayor Kim Janey, City Councilor Andrea Campbell and John Barros, the city's former economic development chief. All five were candidates of color — a major shift away from two centuries of Boston politics dominated by white men.

Wu's parents immigrated to the U.S. from Taiwan. Essaibi George describes herself as a first generation Arab Polish-American.

Whoever wins on Nov. 2 will make history in a city that has never elected a woman or Asian American mayor.

Sheriff: Lawmaker in jail had hidden handcuff key

MI HOWELL — A Michigan lawmaker ordered to jail in a drunken driving case is accused of taping a handcuff key to his foot.

The key was discovered when

state Rep. Jewell Jones, a Detroit-area Democrat, was placed in jail for violating bond conditions, authorities said.

"He truly believes that he doesn't have to follow the judge's orders, doesn't have to follow rules," said Livingston County Sheriff Michael Murphy.

Jones, 26, faces new charges over the key.

Court: Billboard tax violates First Amendment

OH COLUMBUS — A tax levied by the city of Cincinnati on billboard companies in an effort to close a budget shortfall is unconstitutional of First Amendment rights to free speech, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled.

Justice Sharon Kennedy, writing the court's unanimous opinion, said the companies, as publishers of speech, can't be singled out for engaging in protected expression. She also noted that because of various exceptions, the tax applied mainly to two companies.

Those businesses, Lamar Advertising and Norton Outdoor Advertising, indicated the tax would require them to remove less profitable billboards, which has the effect of limiting protected speech, Kennedy said.

Organizers reject bid to cancel state's Bridge Day

WV CHARLESTON — Organizers of West Virginia's largest outdoor festival have rejected a move to cancel the event for the second straight year after Gov. Jim Justice encouraged it to continue.

The Bridge Day Commission rejected 4-2 a proposal from one

of its members to call off the Oct. 16 event over concerns about the coronavirus pandemic.

Tens of thousands of people show up on the third Saturday of October to watch parachutists, zip liners and rappellers on the 3,000-foot-long, 876-foot-high New River Gorge Bridge, the nation's third-highest.

Bridge Day is the only day of the year that the bridge is open to pedestrian traffic.

Prosecutors: Professor sent equipment to Iran

FL MIAMI — A former University of Miami professor, his wife and his sister are facing federal charges related to purchasing genetic sequencing equipment from U.S. manufacturers and illegally shipping it to Iran, prosecutors said.

Mohammad Faghihi, 52, his wife Farzaneh Modarresi, 53, and his sister Faezeh Faghihi, 50, are charged with conspiring to commit an offense against the United States and conspiring to commit money laundering, as well as several other charges.

According to a criminal complaint, Express Gene, a company operated by the family, received wire transfers from accounts in Malaysia, the People's Republic of China, Singapore, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates totaling almost \$3.5 million between October 2016 and November 2020.

Some of that money was used to purchase genetic sequencing equipment from U.S. manufacturers to ship it to Iran without a license, despite sanctions on Iran, investigators said.

— From wire reports



STARS AND STRIPES

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

**Reporting
World, National
and Military News**

Mahomes, Jackson square off again

Associated Press

Leave it to Sammy Watkins — who has played for both teams recently — to set the stage for this weekend's Ravens-Chiefs matchup.

Patrick Mahomes and Lamar Jackson can downplay it all they want, but this game is first and foremost a clash between two MVP quarterbacks.

"I think those guys definitely view it that way," said Watkins, now a receiver for Baltimore. "You can say you're not, but the world is watching two of the best, youngest MVPs in the league, and very talented guys. I'm definitely looking at it that way. Like, man, Lamar needs to win."

This is the fourth straight season Baltimore and Kansas City will face off, and Jackson has yet to beat Mahomes and the Chiefs. The Baltimore quarterback is 30-5 as a starter in the regular season against everybody else.

The Ravens will be at home for Sunday night's game, but Kansas City won 34-20 at Balti-

more last year, and the Chiefs have 11 consecutive regular-season road victories overall.

"When two good teams play each other, there's always going to be a lot of hype and a lot of buildup to the game," Mahomes said. "Seeing Lamar and all the success that he's had with that team, you know two of the top teams in the AFC, so we're going to have to battle every year it seems like in the playoffs or whenever it is."

The Ravens still have to show they can measure up against Kansas City — and now there's added pressure on Baltimore, which is trying to avoid an 0-2 start. The Ravens dropped their opener for the first time since 2015, losing 33-27 in overtime at Las Vegas on Monday night.

The Chiefs, meanwhile, haven't lost in the month of September since 2016. Mahomes is 11-0 in September as a starter, with 35 touchdown passes and no interceptions in those games.

Familiar faces

Watkins played three seasons

with the Chiefs before signing with Baltimore this offseason. He says he can be a resource for defensive coordinator Don "Wink" Martindale.

"I'm trying to win," Watkins said. "Snitch or no snitch, anything I can give Wink and the defense, that's what I'm going to do. Not particularly giving up plays, but, 'Hey man, do this on this guy, and do this on that guy.'"

The Ravens traded tackle Orlando Brown Jr. to Kansas City in the offseason.

Room for improvement

The Ravens and Chiefs rank last and next-to-last in the NFL in total defense after one week. They allowed a combined 948 yards in their openers.

Injuries

The Chiefs are certainly the healthier team. Baltimore lost running backs J.K. Dobbins and Gus Edwards to serious knee injuries before the season started. Defensive back Marcus Peters is also out for the season.

The Ravens were still able to

run the ball against the Raiders. Ty'Son Williams rushed for 65 yards and a touchdown in his NFL debut. The injuries led Baltimore to bring in veteran running backs Latavius Murray, Le'Veon Bell and Devonta Freeman, although only Murray played in the opener.

Freeman was promoted to the active roster Thursday.

"We have four good guys in here, and those guys are all going to be a big part of what we're doing going forward," coach John Harbaugh said.

The injuries keep mounting, though. Tackle Ronnie Stanley has ankle issues, and cornerback Chris Westry an injured knee.

Closing in

Mahomes, the league MVP in 2018, has had a passer rating of 100 or better in 29 games in his career, one shy of Len Dawson's franchise record. He had a rating of 131.4 in last weekend's win over Cleveland — and 133.5 in last year's win over Baltimore.

Seahawks ready for noise when Titans come calling

Associated Press

SEATTLE — The silence of last year's NFL games had some benefits for those who've been trained to communicate in a cauldron of noise.

For example, Seattle linebacker Bobby Wagner could hear his coaches yelling from the sideline.

"It was fun at first because you got to hear what the coaches say during the game that you may not hear," Wagner said. "You got to hear some coaches that don't cuss, cuss a lot during the game. That was very interesting."

Hearing his coaches, or his teammates, will become a thing of the past for Wagner when

Seattle hosts Tennessee on Sunday, playing a regular-season home game in front of fans for the first time since Dec. 29, 2019.

Seattle was regarded as having arguably the best home-field advantage in football before the COVID-19 pandemic forced the Seahawks to play nine games — eight in the regular season and one playoff loss — with only cardboard cutouts in the seats last season.

Nearly 21 months after Seattle's "12s" last got a chance to scream, yell and cause chaos in a meaningful game, they'll be back.

"It was so uncomfortable last year to not share the experience with them because the game has

always been that, where we do it all together," Seattle coach Pete Carroll said. "To know now that are fans get to come, take part in it, and be in this game with us is a big deal. It's exciting."

Those fans will be welcoming a team that looked impressive in its opening win over Indianapolis. With unknowns about how Seattle's new offensive system would operate, Russell Wilson went out and posted one of the best games of his career, throwing nearly as many touchdowns (four) as incompletions (five).

The setting and situation couldn't be much more challenging for the Titans after their lackluster opening loss to Arizona. Tennessee's offensive line

was dominated and its defense was torched by Kyler Murray.

Avoiding the first 0-2 start for Tennessee since 2012 will be a major task.

Protect the QB

The Titans cannot afford to allow QB Ryan Tannehill to be pressured like he was in the opener. Tannehill was sacked six times, lost two fumbles and was intercepted once. Arizona linebacker Chandler Jones had five of those sacks, abusing three-time Pro Bowl left tackle Taylor Lewan. Tennessee gave up 25 sacks all of last season, and Tannehill hadn't been sacked that much in a game since Dec. 1, 2019.

Bills downplaying streak against Miami

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Dan Marino was 28 when the Buffalo Bills last were in the throes of enjoying such a one-sided series against the Miami Dolphins.

It was a while ago: Marino, the Hall of Fame quarterback for Miami, turned 60 this week.

The Bills beat the Dolphins six straight times during that run from 1987 through 1989, a streak they'll try to match on Sunday when the AFC East rivals face off. Miami has had almost no answers for Buffalo in the teams' last five meetings, with the Bills scoring at least 31 points in each of them — including 56 in a most lopsided regular-season finale last winter.

It begs the question of whether Buffalo simply has Miami's number right now.

"I respect where you're coming from with that, but nah," Bills coach Sean McDermott said. "Nah."

There was a consistency in

the themes coming from the respective team camps this week when players and coaches were asked about the Bills' 56-26 win back in January, the second-biggest margin of victory Buffalo has ever enjoyed against the Dolphins. Last year was last year, this year is this year, that team was different, this team is different.

"It didn't go so well," Dolphins coach Brian Flores said, offering an early front-runner in the race for understatement of the year.

Division games always matter — there are only six of them — and this one looms perhaps a bit larger than most, particularly with this only being Week 2. The Dolphins were the only AFC East team to win last week, meaning they can move two games clear of Buffalo in the standings if they finally find a way to solve the Bills' hex over them.

"It's not a grudge match or nothing like that," Dolphins de-

fensive tackle Christian Wilkins said. "Yeah, it's a division game so it's important, and it's the most important game of the year because it's the next one. But we're just going to have to prepare well. You can't think about anything else except the task at hand."

It's human nature to think that the Dolphins who endured that season-ending loss in western New York last January will want to avenge it on Sunday. But Bills quarterback Josh Allen said his team is in a similar position, not wanting to get off to an 0-2 start.

In short, both teams might have a little extra incentive.

"They're 1-0 and we're 0-1," Allen said. "We've got to focus on going into a hostile environment and trying to execute."

Home openers

The Dolphins — even aided by the South Florida heat and humidity — have lost 12 of their last 18 home openers. They're

0-2 in home debuts under Flores, falling 31-28 to Buffalo last season and 59-10 to Baltimore in 2019.

The Bills are trying to win a third consecutive road opener. It would be their longest such streak since four straight from 1991 through 1994.

Respect

Dolphins CB Xavien Howard, who had the forced fumble and recovery that sealed Miami's Week 1 win over New England, had high praise this week for Bills CB Tre'Davious White.

Both are among the NFL's best at that position.

"He's a baller," Howard said. "He tackles well. He plays the ball. He does a lot of great things well. He's also quick. Just watching his game — I try to watch a lot of guys' game, especially when I'm playing against them. Each corner, I try to learn from and try to see what they do well."

Steelers and Raiders hoping to build on Week 1 wins

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Mike Tomlin spent four years on Jon Gruden's staff in Tampa Bay in the early 2000s, helping mold a defense that won a Super Bowl and gleaning what he could from his fiery boss.

Nearing two decades later, the lessons Tomlin — now in his 15th season as the head coach in Pittsburgh — learned from Gruden endure.

"Gruden has no fear," Tomlin said. "He doesn't. He looks at an issue or a problem, and he sees it as an opportunity. I worked for him for four years. You can't fake that. It's every day from him."

And so it is with Gruden's former pupil, who will stand on the opposite sideline from one of his mentors when Tomlin and the Steelers (1-0) host Gruden and the Las Vegas Raiders (1-0) on Sunday.

One of the tenets of Tomlin's coaching philosophy is the idea of not living in fear. His team embodied that philosophy during a season-opening win at Buffalo last week,

rallying from 10 points down to stun the defending AFC East champions.

Even the veterans whooped it up after the Steelers sent a message that even with a rookie-laden offense and 39-year-old Ben Roethlisberger throwing on a rebuilt right elbow, they're still relevant in the tough AFC North.

It was thrilling for Pittsburgh. It was also just one game out of 17. The same goes for Las Vegas, which surged past Baltimore on Monday night, suggesting the rebuild Gruden began when he returned to coaching in 2018 after a decade away may finally be taking hold.

It looked that way a season ago, too, before a 2-0 start faded to an 8-8 finish. So Gruden, quarterback Derek Carr and the rest of the Raiders are not getting too far ahead of themselves. Still, Las Vegas is heading east with a chance to send the same kind of message the Steelers sent at Buffalo.

Harris in a hurry?

Steelers rookie running back Najee Har-

ris endured a relatively quiet NFL debut, running for 45 yards on 16 carries behind a new-look offensive line that needed a full half to start finding its footing.

Still, Harris didn't miss any of Pittsburgh's 58 snaps, a sign of how confident Tomlin is in both Harris' conditioning and his potential. The sledding for Harris and the line could be a bit easier against the Raiders, who allowed Baltimore to run for 189 yards in the opener even with the Ravens decimated by injuries to their top three running backs.

Short turnaround

The Raiders have a tough task this week, heading on a long trip following an emotional win Monday night. They've lost the last six times they had to travel after a Monday night game. Last season, they got beat 36-20 by New England following a prime-time win at home over New Orleans in their first game ever in Las Vegas. Gruden gave the team a lighter week with just a walkthrough on Wednesday before two days of practice.

Reds end Dodgers' winning streak at six

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Luis Castillo struck out 10 while outpitching Walker Buehler, Kyle Farmer doubled twice and the Cincinnati Reds snapped the Los Angeles Dodgers' six-game winning streak with a 3-1 victory Friday night.

The Reds have dropped their last seven series to slip to fourth in the NL wild-card standings, a half-game behind San Diego and a full game behind second-place St. Louis.

The Dodgers, already assured at least a wild-card spot, began the day one game behind San Francisco in the NL West.

Castillo (8-15) didn't allow a runner past second base in 6⅓ shutout innings. He threw a season-high 111 pitches and gave up five hits and two walks.

Yankees 8, Indians 0: Corey Kluber (5-3) won for the first time in nearly four months, pitching six sharp innings in his first outing against the team that helped him blossom into a star, and host New York routed Cleveland.

With 14 games left, New York moved a half-game ahead of Toronto for one of the two AL wild-card berths, a half-game behind Boston.

Twins 7, Blue Jays 3: Vladimir Guerrero Jr. connected for his major league-leading 46th homer, but Jorge Polanco, Josh Donaldson, and Miguel Sanó hit consecutive homers as visiting Minnesota beat Toronto.

The Blue Jays slipped into the third spot in the AL wild-card race, one game behind Boston and a half-game behind the Yankees.

White Sox 8, Rangers 0: Luis Robert hit a three-run double, Dylan Cease (12-7) struck out 10 in five innings and visiting

Chicago moved closer to its first division title in 13 years by trouncing Texas.

Chicago's magic number over Cleveland fell to five for winning the AL Central.

Red Sox 7, Orioles 1: Chris Sale returned from COVID-19 to pitch five innings of two-hit ball, and Bobby Dalbec homered to help host Boston hand Baltimore its 100th loss.

Baltimore became the first team to reach 100 losses this season.

Giants 6, Braves 5, (11): Pinch-hitting pitcher Kevin Gausman lofted a full-count, bases-loaded sacrifice fly in the 11th inning and host San Francisco edged Atlanta to increase its NL West lead.

Atlanta had its NL East lead trimmed to two games over Philadelphia.

Phillies 4, Mets 3: Zack Wheeler (14-9) limited the damage in a short but effective outing against his old team, Brad Miller hit a tiebreaking homer and visiting Philadelphia held off New York.

The Phillies moved within two games of NL East leader Atlanta and stayed 2½ games behind St. Louis for the league's second wild card.

Brewers 8, Cubs 5: Kolten Wong hit a tiebreaking single with two outs in the eighth inning and host Milwaukee moved closer to a playoff berth by beating Chicago.

The Brewers' magic number for wrapping up the NL Central title fell to four. Their magic number for clinching a fourth consecutive postseason appearance shrank to two.

Rays 7, Tigers 4 (10): Brett Phillips hit a three-run homer in the 10th inning and host Tampa Bay came back from a three-run deficit in the ninth to beat Detroit.

The Rays maintained their 8½-game lead

in the AL East over Boston.

Mariners 6, Royals 2: Seattle rookie Jarred Kelenic spoiled the major league debut of Kansas City pitcher Jonathan Heasley by hitting a pair of two-run homers to lift visiting Seattle.

Kelenic's first multihomer game kept the Mariners 3½ games behind the Yankees for the second AL wild card.

Athletics 5, Angels 4: Cole Irvin (10-13) pitched six solid innings to earn his first victory in four weeks, and visiting Oakland kept pace in the AL wild-card race with a victory over Los Angeles.

Josh Harrison had two RBIs and Mark Canha scored the go-ahead run on a passed ball in the sixth for the A's (80-67), who won their third straight and remained 2½ games out of the final playoff spot.

Pirates 2, Marlins 1: Wil Crowe (4-7) won for the first time since July 30 as host Pittsburgh beat Miami.

Rockies 9, Nationals 8: Elías Díaz hit a tying homer and Brendan Rodgers had an RBI single as visiting Colorado rallied in the ninth inning to beat Washington.

Astros 4, Diamondbacks 3 (10): Chas McCormick was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded to drive in the winning run in the 10th inning as host Houston sent Arizona to its 100th loss.

Cardinals 8, Padres 2: Dylan Carlson homered twice, including a grand slam, to help Miles Mikolas win for the first time in two years as streaking St. Louis beat visiting San Diego in the opener of a critical series between wild-card contenders.

The Cardinals' sixth straight win kept them a game ahead of Cincinnati for the second National League wild card. San Diego dropped 1½ games behind St. Louis.

Allmendinger slides across finish to Xfinity Series title

Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — AJ Allmendinger slid sideways across the Bristol Motor Speedway finish line to edge rival Austin Cindric for both the Friday night win and the NASCAR Xfinity Series regular-season championship.

The race was Cindric's to win and the reigning Xfinity champion was four laps away from a second straight regular-season title and a healthy lead for the start of the playoffs.

Instead, a late caution gave Allmendinger a shot to steal a sixth win from Cindric and

continue his own fairytale season.

The rivals crashed each other as the cars crossed the finish line and Allmendinger's fourth win of the season was awarded because his Chevrolet was sliding ahead of Cindric's under the checkered flag.

The win gave Allmendinger the regular-season title over Cindric by 10 points. More important, it tied the two at the top of the standings for the start of the playoffs next week at Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

Chara going to Islanders

Zdeno Chara is returning to the team

where he started his career, agreeing to terms on a one-year deal with the New York Islanders.

The team announced the contract Saturday, the latest in a series of moves by seasoned general manager Lou Lamoriello designed to get the Islanders over the hump in the playoffs.

Chara wasn't even sure he'd continue playing in the NHL, and now he'll take the ice for a 24th season at age 44 with the team he broke in with. He was a 1996 Islanders draft pick and made his debut with them in 1997 before being traded to Ottawa in 2001.