

US COVID deaths topping 1,900 a day

Associated Press

COVID-19 deaths in the United States have climbed to an average of more than 1,900 a day for the first time since early March, with experts saying the virus is preying largely on a distinct group: 71 million unvaccinated Americans.

The increasingly lethal turn has filled hospitals, complicated the start of the school year, delayed the return to offices and demoralized health care workers.

"It is devastating," said Dr. Dena Hubbard, a pediatrician in the Kansas City, Mo., area who has cared for babies delivered prematurely by cesarean section in a last-ditch effort to save their mothers, some of whom died. For health workers, the deaths, combined with misinformation and disbelief about the virus, have been "heart-wrenching, soul-crushing."

Twenty-two people died in one week alone at CoxHealth hospitals in the Springfield-Branson area, a level almost as high as that of all of Chicago. West Virginia has had

more deaths in the first three weeks of September — 340 — than in the previous three months combined. Georgia is averaging 125 dead per day, more than California or other more populous states.

"I've got to tell you, a guy has got to wonder if we are ever going to see the end of it or not," said Collin Follis, who is the coroner in Missouri's Madison County and works at a funeral home.

The nation was stunned back in December when it was witnessing 3,000 deaths a day. But that was when almost no one was vaccinated.

Now, nearly 64% of the U.S. population has received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. And yet, average deaths per day have climbed 40% over the past two weeks, from 1,387 to 1,947, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

Health experts say the vast majority of the hospitalized and dead have been unvaccinated. While some vaccinated people have suffered breakthrough infections,

those tend to be mild.

The number of vaccine-eligible Americans who have yet to get a shot has been put at more than 70 million.

"There is a very real risk you'll end up in the hospital or even in the obituary pages," Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff, chief medical officer for the Ohio Department of Health, said to the unvaccinated. "Don't become a statistic when there is a simple, safe and effective alternative to go out today and get vaccinated."

Many low-vaccination communities also have high rates of conditions like obesity and diabetes, said Dr. William Moss of Johns Hopkins. And that combination — along with the more contagious delta variant — has proved lethal.

New cases of the coronavirus per day in the U.S. have dropped since the start of September and are now running at approximately 139,000. But deaths typically take longer to fall because victims often linger for weeks before succumbing.

Officials: Many migrants from border staying in US

Associated Press

DEL RIO, Texas — Many Haitian migrants camped in a small Texas border town are being released in the United States, two U.S. officials said, undercutting the Biden administration's public statements that the thousands in the camp faced immediate expulsion.

Haitians have been freed on a "very, very large scale" in recent days, according to one U.S. official who put the figure in the thousands. The official, who has direct knowledge of operations, was not authorized to discuss the matter Tuesday and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Many have been released with notices to appear at an immigration office within 60 days, an outcome that requires less processing time from Border Patrol agents than ordering an appearance in immigration court and points to the speed at which authorities are moving, the official said.

The Homeland Security Department has been busing Haitians from Del Rio to El Pa-

so, Laredo and the Rio Grande Valley along the Texas border, and this week added flights to Tucson, Ariz., the official said. They are processed by the Border Patrol at those locations.

A second U.S. official, also with direct knowledge and speaking on the condition of anonymity, said large numbers of Haitians were being processed under immigration laws and not being placed on expulsion flights to Haiti. The official couldn't be more specific about how many.

The decision to release many Haitians, particularly without a clearly stated criteria for who stays and who gets returned to Haiti, will likely add to criticism of the White House, which is already facing bipartisan condemnation. Republicans say Biden administration policies led Haitians to believe they would get asylum. Democrats are expressing outrage after images went viral this week of Border Patrol agents on horseback using aggressive tactics against the migrants.

Attorneys and advocates say they have so far been denied access to the migrant camp underneath the international bridge in Del Rio and have been given very little information by officials on what is happening with the immigrants.

Advocates also don't know how many of the immigrants have been deported so far and how many have been released into the U.S., he said.

U.S. authorities scrambled in recent days for buses to Tucson but resorted to flights when they couldn't find enough transportation contractors, both officials said. Coast Guard planes took Haitians from Del Rio to El Paso.

The releases in the U.S. were occurring despite the signaling of a massive effort to expel Haitians on flights to Haiti under pandemic-related authority that denies migrants an opportunity to seek asylum. A third U.S. official not authorized to discuss operations said there were seven daily flights to Haiti planned starting Wednesday.

Milley holds talks with Russian counterpart

Associated Press

HELSINKI, Finland — The top American military officer held talks Wednesday with his Russian counterpart as the United States struggles to secure basing rights and other counterterrorism support in countries bordering Afghanistan — an effort Moscow has opposed.

The six-hour meeting in Finland's capital between Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Gen. Valery Gerasimov, chief of the Russian General Staff, came at a crucial time after the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Without troops on the ground, the U.S. needs to reach more basing, intelligence sharing and other agreements to help monitor al-Qaida and Islamic State militants in Afghanistan.

Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, had said in July that Moscow warned the U.S. that any deployment of American troops in countries neighboring Afghanistan "is unacceptable." He said

Russia told the U.S. "in a direct and straightforward way that it would change a lot of things not only in our perceptions of what's going on in that important region, but also in our relations with the United States."

Ryabkov also said that Russia had a "frank talk" with the Central Asian countries to warn them not to allow U.S. troops within their borders.

Both sides agreed not to disclose details of the talks, as has been the practice in previous meetings and calls. Afterward, Milley said: "It was a productive meeting. When military leaders of great powers communicate, the world is a safer place."

He recently made clear that the basing issue was a key topic on his European trip, saying he discussed it with NATO counterparts when they met in Greece over the weekend.

Milley, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and American intelligence officials have warned that al-Qaida or IS could regenerate and pose a threat to the United

States in one year to two years.

U.S. military leaders have said they can conduct counterterrorism surveillance and, if necessary, strikes in Afghanistan from military assets based in other countries. But they acknowledge that surveillance flights from bases in the Persian Gulf are long and provide limited time in the air over Afghanistan. So the U.S. and allies want basing agreements, overflight rights and increased intelligence-sharing with nations closer to Afghanistan, such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan.

So far there are no indications of any progress. Moscow maintains a tight grip on the Central Asian nations and opposes a Western presence there.

The U.S. used the Transit Center at Manas, in Kyrgyzstan, for a large part of the Afghanistan war, moving troops in and out of the war zone through that base. Under pressure from Russia and its allies, however, Kyrgyzstan insisted the U.S. vacate the base in 2014.

4 Marines injured in Kabul attack still at Walter Reed

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Four Marines injured in the attack by an Islamic State suicide bomber at the Kabul airport are still being treated for their wounds at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center nearly a month later, Marine Corps spokesman Capt. Johnny Henderson said Tuesday.

One of the Marines is in "very serious but stable condition," while three others are in "serious but stable condition," Henderson said. The service did not provide further de-

tails on their injuries or the names of those injured, which is Marine Corps policy to protect their privacy.

The numbers are down from Sept. 7 when 15 wounded Marines were being treated at Walter Reed, one of whom was in critical condition, three were in serious condition and 11 were in stable condition, Henderson said at the time.

The injured Marines are among the survivors of the ISIS-K attack at Hamid Karzai International Airport on Aug. 26 during the final days of the U.S. military's withdrawal

from Afghanistan. Thirteen troops were killed and more than 20 others were injured when an ISIS-K terrorist detonated an explosive vest and gunmen fired into the crowds near the airport's Abbey gate.

ISIS-K, an abbreviation for ISIS-Khorasan, is the Afghanistan branch of the Islamic State terrorist group.

Seventeen Marines were wounded in the attack, and all the troops killed were awarded Purple Hearts and approved this month for combat action ribbons, according to the Marine Corps.

1 pilot from Navy jet crash in Texas is out of hospital

Associated Press

LAKE WORTH, Texas — One of the two pilots injured when their military training jet crashed into a suburban Fort Worth, Texas, neighborhood over the weekend has been released from the hospital.

The instructor pilot was released from the hospital Monday, the Chief of Naval Air Training in Corpus Christi said in a statement.

Navy officials said Tuesday that the student

pilot remained hospitalized in serious but stable condition.

Three homes were damaged in Sunday's crash, but no one on the ground was seriously injured. The two pilots ejected from the aircraft before it crashed into the neighborhood in Lake Worth, which is just west of Fort Worth.

Lake Worth police have said that one of the pilots was electrocuted after being caught in

power lines.

Navy officials have said that the Navy T-45C Goshawk was on a routine training flight that originated from an airport in Corpus Christi, about 350 miles south of Lake Worth along the Gulf Coast. The jet was based at Naval Air Station Kingsville, near Corpus Christi.

Navy officials said the investigation into what caused the crash is ongoing.

Funding plan faces GOP opposition in Senate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House voted to keep the government funded, suspend the federal debt limit and provide disaster and refugee aid, setting up a high-stakes showdown with Republicans who oppose the package despite the risk of triggering a fiscal crisis.

The federal government faces a shutdown if funding stops on Sept. 30, the end of the fiscal year. Additionally, at some point in October, the United States risks defaulting on its accumulated debt load if its borrowing limits are not waived or adjusted.

Rushing to prevent that dire outcome, the Democratic-led

House passed the measure Tuesday night by a party-line vote of 220-211. The bill now goes to the Senate, where it is likely to falter because of overwhelming GOP opposition.

“Our country will suffer greatly if we do not act now to stave off this unnecessary and preventable crisis,” House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said shortly before the vote.

Backed by the White House, the Democratic leaders pushed the package to approval at a time of great uncertainty in Congress. With lawmakers already chiseling away at the \$3.5 trillion price tag of President Joe Biden’s broad “build back better” agenda, immediate atten-

tion focused on the upcoming deadlines to avert deeper problems if votes to shore up government funding fail.

The measure approved Tuesday would provide stopgap money to keep the government funded to Dec. 3 and extend borrowing authority through the end of 2022. It includes \$28.6 billion in disaster relief for the aftermath of Hurricane Ida and other extreme weather events, and \$6.3 billion to support Afghanistan evacuees in the fallout from the end of the 20-year war.

While suspending the debt ceiling allows the government to meet financial obligations already incurred, Republicans argued it would also facilitate a

spending binge in the months ahead.

“I will not support signing a blank check as this majority is advancing the most reckless expansion of government in generations,” said Rep. Dan Meuser, R-Pa., during the debate.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said since Democrats control the White House and Congress, it’s their problem to find the votes—even though he had relied on bipartisan cooperation to approve the debt limits when Republicans were in charge.

“The debt ceiling will be raised as it always should be, but it will be raised by the Democrats,” McConnell said.

Trump sues NYT, niece over records for tax story

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Former President Donald Trump on Tuesday sued his estranged niece and The New York Times over a 2018 story about his family’s wealth and tax practices that was partly based on confidential documents she gave the newspaper’s reporters.

Trump’s lawsuit, filed in state court in New York, accuses Mary Trump of breaching a settlement agreement by disclosing tax records she received in a dispute over family patriarch Fred Trump’s estate.

The lawsuit accuses the Times and three of its investigative reporters, Susanne Craig, David Barstow and Russell Buettner, of relentlessly seeking out Mary Trump as a source of information and convincing her to turn over documents. The suit claims that the reporters were aware the settlement agreement barred her from disclosing the documents.

The Times’ story challenged Trump’s claims of self-made wealth by documenting how his father, Fred, had given him at least \$413 million over the dec-

ades, including through tax avoidance schemes.

Mary Trump identified herself in a book published last year as the source of the documents provided to the Times.

Trump’s lawsuit alleges Mary Trump, the Times and its reporters “were motivated by a personal vendetta” against him and a desire to push a political agenda.

The defendants “engaged in an insidious plot to obtain confidential and highly-sensitive records which they exploited for their own benefit and utilized as a means of falsely legitimizing their publicized works,” the suit said.

In a statement to NBC News, Mary Trump said of her uncle, “I think he is a loser, and he is going to throw anything against the wall he can. It’s desperation. The walls are closing in and he is throwing anything against the wall that he thinks will stick.”

A Times spokesperson, Danielle Rhoads Ha, said the lawsuit “is an attempt to silence independent news organizations and we plan to vigorously defend against it.”

Senator blocks bill to approve War on Terrorism memorial

By NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — An effort to pass legislation that would allow for the construction of a Global War on Terrorism Memorial on the National Mall was blocked Monday out of concern that its passage would be unfair and create a bad precedent for any future memorials.

Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, asked on the Senate floor Monday evening that her colleagues approve the bill under unanimous consent, meaning the chamber could pass the legislation unless someone stood to object. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., blocked the vote.

The bill seeks to exempt the Global War on Terrorism Memorial from a 2003 law that prohibits any more development on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

“This legislation would override this provision,” Manchin said. “This precedent would reopen fights to locate other memorials on the National Mall, create conflict and ultimately delay the construction of this memorial.”

Organizers behind the effort to establish the memorial are renewing their push for it to be on the National Mall after the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in August.

They held a news conference Tuesday, urging Congress to consider the bill.

“We’re at a significant moment in the history of the Global War on Terrorism,” said Marina Jackman, an Army veteran and the president of the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Foundation. “Now more than ever, the service member and veteran community needs a place to gather, reflect and heal.”

Ernst, along with Sen. Maggie Hassan, D-N.H., introduced the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Location Act last year, but it failed to make it through Congress. They reintroduced the bill earlier this year.

The Senate subcommittee on national parks held a hearing on the issue in June. The bill has not yet been considered by the full committee.

Decline in US births may be reversing

Associated Press

While there has been a decline in births in the United States during the pandemic, a new report released Tuesday by the U.S. Census Bureau suggests the drop may have turned a corner last March as births started rebounding.

The decline in births was most noticeable at the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021. In December 2020, births in the U.S. were down 7.7% from the previous year, and they were

down 9.4% last January compared to the previous January.

Births continued to be down 2.8% in February from the previous year, but in March births barely declined, only 0.15%, compared to March 2020, when the new coronavirus was declared a national emergency.

"This trend suggests that some people who postponed having babies last year had them this year," said Anne Morse, a Census Bureau demographer in the report. "The win-

ter decrease in births may have been prompted by couples who consciously chose to delay having children amid the uncertainty of the pandemic. It may also have been influenced by stress or limited physical interaction with a sexual partner."

It's probably too soon to determine if births will still go in an upward year-over-year projection given the herky-jerky nature of pandemic recovery. After all, the babies born in the U.S. last March were likely con-

ceived in June 2020 when spring lockdowns seemed to be easing up. But that optimism was soon met with the summer surge of 2020.

"It is still too soon to make broad conclusions about the pandemic's effect on U.S. birth trends," the report said. "But the data so far indicate there was a temporary drop in births amid the pandemic after accounting for other factors that existed before the pandemic — declining births and seasonality."

Apple, Google raise concern by withdrawing Russian app

Associated Press

BERKELEY, Calif. — Big Tech companies that operate around the globe have long promised to obey local laws and to protect civil rights while doing business. But when Apple and Google capitulated to Russian demands and removed a political-opposition app from their local app stores, it raised worries that two of the world's most successful companies are more comfortable bowing to undemocratic edicts—and maintaining a steady flow of profits—than upholding the rights of their users.

The app in question, Smart Voting, was a tool for organizing opposition to Russia President Vladimir Putin ahead of elections held over the weekend. The ban levied last week by a pair of the world's most powerful companies galled supporters of free elections and free expression.

"This is bad news for democracy and dissent all over the world," said Natalia Krapiva, tech legal counsel for Access Now, an internet freedom group. "We expect to see other dictators copying Russia's tactics."

Technology companies offering consumer services from search to social media to apps have long walked a tightrope in many of the less democratic na-

tions of the world. As Apple, Google and other major companies such as Amazon, Microsoft and Facebook have grown more powerful over the past decade, so have government ambitions to harness that power for their own ends.

"Now this is the poster child for political oppression," said Sascha Meinrath, a Penn State University professor who studies online censorship issues. Google and Apple "have bolstered the probability of this happening again."

Neither Apple nor Google responded to requests for comment from The Associated Press when the news of the app's removal broke last week; both remained silent this week as well.

Google also denied access to two documents on its online service Google Docs that listed candidates endorsed by Smart Voting, and YouTube blocked similar videos.

According to a person with direct knowledge of the matter, Google faced legal demands by Russian regulators and threats of criminal prosecution of individual employees if it failed to comply. The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

UN says Taliban want to address General Assembly

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — Who should represent Afghanistan at the United Nations this month? It's a complex question with plenty of political implications.

The Taliban, the country's new rulers for a matter of weeks, are challenging the credentials of their country's former U.N. ambassador and want to speak at the General Assembly's high-level meeting of world leaders this week, the international body says.

The question now facing U.N. officials comes just over a month after the Taliban, ejected from Afghanistan by the United States and its allies after 9/11, swept back into power as U.S. forces prepared to withdraw from the country at the end of August. The Taliban stunned the world by taking territory with surprising speed and little resistance from the U.S.-trained Afghan military. The Western-backed government collapsed Aug. 15.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Secretary-General Antonio Guterres received a communication Sept. 15 from the currently accredited Afghan ambassador, Ghulam Isaczai, with the list of Afghanistan's delegation for the assembly's 76th annual session.

Five days later, Guterres received another communication with the letterhead "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs," signed by "Ameer Khan Muttaqi" as "Minister of Foreign Affairs," requesting to participate in the U.N. gathering of world leaders.

Muttaqi said in the letter that former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani was "ousted" as of Aug. 15 and that countries across the world "no longer recognize him as president," and therefore Isaczai no longer represents Afghanistan, Dujarric said.

The Taliban said they were nominating a new U.N. permanent representative, Mohammad Suhail Shaheen, the U.N. spokesman said. He has been a spokesman for the Taliban during peace negotiations in Qatar.

Senior U.S. State Department officials said they were aware of the Taliban's request—the U.S. is a member of the U.N. credentials committee—but they would not predict how that panel might rule. One of the officials, however, said the committee "would take some time to deliberate," suggesting the Taliban's envoy would not be able to speak at the General Assembly at this session at least during the high-level leaders' week.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man gets prison for pointing laser at helo

AL BIRMINGHAM — An Alabama man has been sentenced to eight months in federal prison for aiming a laser at a helicopter last year.

U.S. District Judge Anna M. Manasco sentenced Gabriel Lopez Mathews, 27, who pleaded guilty to the charge in April, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Alabama said Wednesday in a news release. The maximum penalty for aiming a laser at an aircraft is five years in prison.

The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Star 1 helicopter was helping the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency in a nighttime operation to recover stolen firearms on April 11, 2020. While flying below an approach path for the Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport, the sheriff's helicopter received numerous laser strikes from a residence below.

The FAA reported 6,852 laser incidents in 2020, up from 6,136 in 2019 and 5,663 in 2018.

Feds: Bomb technicians caused major explosion

CA LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles police bomb technicians made major miscalculations in June when they detonated illegal fireworks improperly and caused a massive explosion that rocked a city neighborhood and injured 27 people in June, according to a report by federal investigators.

The 51-page report from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, released Tuesday, ruled out other possible causes, such as an equipment defect, for the June 30 blast in South Los Angeles. The Los Angeles Police Department also issued its own 53-page after-action report.

The technicians overloaded a containment chamber with the illegal fireworks above the equipment's safety rating after authorities were called to a South LA home for a huge stash of fireworks ahead

of the Fourth of July.

The vessel exploded, and debris rained down on dozens of residences, businesses and vehicles. The ATF estimates that the catastrophic blast caused more than \$1 million in damage to the neighborhood.

Sheriff raising money to aid kids at Halloween

GA LEESBURG — A Georgia sheriff's department is raising money to help needy children have a happy Halloween.

The Lee County Sheriff's Office in southwest Georgia will use the cash donations to buy Halloween costumes for kids whose families otherwise couldn't afford them.

The idea started with a Lee County sheriff's lieutenant who visits schools each year to give safety tips for trick-or-treating, WALB-TV reported.

The sheriff's office works with a nonprofit, Lee County Family Connection, which helps financially struggling families, to identify children who would benefit from the Halloween fundraiser. On Oct. 2, sheriff's deputies will accompany the children and their parents on a shopping spree at a retailer in near-by Albany. Each child will get \$50 to assemble the perfect costume.

Plant to pretreat fats for renewable fuel use

NE DAKOTA CITY — Construction is starting next week on a Nebraska plant that will pretreat animal fat for eventual conversion into renewable diesel fuel.

The JST Global facility is a joint venture between Tyson Foods and Jacob Stern & Sons. It will be built on 6.5 acres next to Tyson's flagship beef plant in Dakota City and will complement a similar JST plant in Houston, The Sioux City Journal reports.

Dakota Dunes-based Tyson Fresh Meats, which operates six beef plants and six pork plants in the U.S., has supplied Jacob Stern & Sons, the largest U.S. processor and marketer of animal fats, with pork

and beef-derived fats and oils for over 50 years.

The animal fat products are used for industries ranging from pharmaceuticals to animal nutrition and the growing renewable foods market.

Woman dies when car falls from parking deck

CA ORANGE — A woman died after she drove her car through a wall on the fourth story of a Southern California parking structure and it fell to the ground, authorities said Friday.

The Orange County Register reports the car landed on the ground upside down and bystanders flipped it over.

The crash occurred at a usually busy intersection near a hospital and a children's hospital in the city of Orange, said Orange police Sgt. Phil McMullin.

No one else was injured in the crash, McMullin said, adding that the woman was the car's only occupant.

Native Americans aim to boost voting power

NM SANTA FE — A coalition of Native American communities has proposed redrawing New Mexico's political map to boost Indigenous voters' influence in elections.

The proposed changes from New Mexico's 19 Native American pueblos and the Jicarilla Apache Nation, outlined Monday, would reshape a congressional swing district where Republicans regained control in 2020. They would also lead to more Native American potential voters in six state House and three Senate districts northwestern New Mexico.

The proposals were submitted to a committee that will provide recommendations to the Legislature at the end of October. The Democrat-led Legislature can draw its own lines. Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham must approve the redistricting, and court challenges are possible.

New Mexico is home to 23 federally recognized tribes.

Man accused of posing as agent is arrested

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A man with a history of pretending to be a law enforcement officer was arrested in Minnesota after a TikTok user alerted a woman he was dating that he was faking it again.

Authorities said in a complaint filed Friday that Reuel Devon Simmons, 52, of Dodge Center, used the name "Rey Reeves" and regularly held himself out as a federal agent on social media. He is charged in federal court in Minneapolis with impersonating a federal officer.

Simmons' profile photo on TikTok showed him wearing law enforcement gear. He made several posts displaying police equipment, badges and firearms and referred "explicitly and implicitly" to himself as a federal agent, authorities said. He had more than 10,000 followers on TikTok, including one woman from Georgia who began a romantic relationship with him.

The woman, who dated Simmons for about eight months, eventually went to the FBI after a TikTok user posted about Simmons impersonating a police officer "again."

Vandalism at Sikh temple a possible hate crime

WA FEDERAL WAY — Police in Washington state are searching for a man they say vandalized a Sikh temple south of Seattle in what's being investigated as a possible hate crime.

Several portable electronic devices were stolen during the Friday break-in at the Khalsa Gurmat Center in Federal Way. The building houses religious, educational and social services for local Sikh residents. The suspect was seen on surveillance video damaging the center's main hall and prayer area, KOMO-TV reported.

No one from the center was present at the time.

— From wire reports

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Stacked US team favored in Ryder Cup

Associated Press

The Americans would seem to have a lot in their favor at the Ryder Cup.

They are on home soil at Whistling Straits along the Wisconsin shores of Lake Michigan. A full house is expected, along with louder-than-usual cheering for the Stars & Stripes because of COVID-19 travel restrictions for European-based fans.

As for the players? Younger than ever, to be sure, but no less stacked. The Americans have eight of the top 10 in the world rankings — Europe only has Jon Rahm at No. 1 — on a team that has won twice as many majors.

This is nothing new, of course. With one exception — the Americans always bring a better collection of players to the Ryder Cup.

They just rarely leave with the precious gold trophy.

“We have the best players this year,” said Paul Azinger, the lead analyst for NBC Sports who still uses pronouns as if it were 2008 when he was the U.S. captain. “And obviously, they (Europe) roll in with the most confidence and maybe the best team.”

The trick is getting the American players to realize that. At the last Ryder Cup in France three years ago, the United States was just as loaded, with nine major champions on the 12-man squad who had combined to win 10 of the last 16 majors.

They got smoked again.

“I feel like on paper, from head to toe, the world ranking, I would say we’re a stronger team,” U.S. captain Steve Stricker said. “But I don’t think our guys feel we’re better. They know deep down how hard it is to beat them.”

All that matters on paper are the results. Europe has won nine of the last 12 times in the Ryder Cup. And while the U.S. still holds a 26-14-2 advantage dating to the start in 1927, that’s not the real measure. Continental Europeans did not join the fray until 1979, and they are 11-8-1 since then.

Europe, with Pádraig Harrington now at the helm of the juggernaut, is trying to extend its dominance at the 43rd Ryder Cup, which was postponed a year because of the pandemic.

Three relentless days of matches Sept. 24-26 will be held at Whistling Straits, the cliffside

course with 1,000 or so bunkers that has hosted the PGA Championship three times in the last 17 years. American players, it should be noted, have been runner-up in all three.

Why do the Europeans keep winning the Ryder Cup?

They relish the role as underdogs. They seem to play with a chip on their shoulders, perhaps because the Americans don’t — and probably should — have one on theirs.

“That’s our advantage, I guess, in a way, right?” Ian Poulter said in a SiriusXM PGA Tour Radio interview. “That we have delivered when perhaps we shouldn’t have delivered. And this is the magical question that gets asked all the time. That’s what has the American press scratching their head. That’s what has the American team scratching their heads at times. On paper — on paper — the U.S. team should have delivered.

“It’s for us to enjoy and for the American team to figure out,” he said. “There is a level of magic sauce which we’ve been able to create over the years.”

The six rookies are the most for the Americans since 2008

when they won at Valhalla.

Those include Collin Morikawa, who was an amateur when the last Ryder Cup was played and since then has won two majors, a World Golf Championship and led the U.S. standings in his first year of eligibility. It includes FedEx Cup champion Patrick Cantlay and Olympic gold medalist Xander Schauffele, who were a formidable team at the Presidents Cup in Australia two years ago.

“I think it’s a good time for a younger influx of players,” Schauffele said, “and really excited to run with these guys.”

This is the drama Stricker can do without as he leads a team desperate for a win. He said he spoke to Brooks Koepka and Bryson DeChambeau in the last month, and they assured him they would put their differences aside.

That’s never been a problem for Europe, which has not been immune to personality conflicts over the years. It just never shows inside the ropes, in uniform, with a 17-inch trophy at stake.

Maybe it’s that European magic sauce. Whatever it is, it’s been working.

In fourth decade, Spain’s Garcia still going strong

Associated Press

Sergio Garcia didn’t waste much time making a point on how he values the Ryder Cup.

He was a teenager — at 19, still the youngest player in Ryder Cup history — and just over five months removed from being the low amateur at the Masters, when Garcia and Jesper Parnevik took down Tiger Woods and Tom Lehman in foursomes at Brookline.

That was his first point. And that was just the start.

Now with more gray than dark brown in his stubble, the 41-year-old Spaniard sets off for his 10th Ryder Cup at Whistling Straits to extend a remarkable run defined by numbers.

He is one of only four players to compete

in Ryder Cups across four decades, the first one in 1999, with no reason to think this one will be the last.

Garcia has won 25½ points (winning 62% of his matches), which already is the most in Ryder Cup history. That’s as many points as this U.S. team combined. He is two wins away from breaking the Ryder Cup record held by Nick Faldo, which would be sweet for other reasons.

Perhaps most telling is the list of Americans who have lost to him — Woods and Phil Mickelson (four times each), Davis Love III and David Duval, Steve Stricker and Jim Furyk.

“Sergio Garcia loves the Ryder Cup,” European captain Pádraig Harrington said, a rare occasion when the Irishman felt no need to elaborate.

The Ryder Cup is everything to him, as much as that Masters green jacket he won in 2017 for his first major. And yes, he’s done OK. But while he has contributed points, that’s not how Garcia keeps score.

He has been on six winning teams as a player, one as a last-minute vice captain in Wales.

“Being the highest points scorer in Ryder Cup history, that was never my goal,” Garcia said. “It’s something that I never thought about because I was always focused on winning the Ryder Cup as a team. I never thought, ‘Oh, even if we lose, if I win 3 or 3½ points, I had a great Ryder Cup.’ No, that doesn’t do it for me.

“I’ve always said I could win five matches. If we don’t win the Ryder Cup, it’s not a good Ryder Cup for me,” he said.

Texans will start Mills against Panthers

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Rookie Davis Mills will start at quarterback for the Houston Texans on Thursday night against the Carolina Panthers with Tyrod Taylor out with a hamstring injury.

Coach David Culley announced the decision Tuesday and said Taylor would be inactive. Later Tuesday the Texans placed Taylor on injured re-

serve which means that he must miss at least three games.

Culley said Houston plans to promote Jeff Driskel from the practice squad to back up Mills against the Panthers (2-0).

Taylor was injured in the first half of the Texans' 31-21 loss to Cleveland on Sunday and didn't return after halftime. Mills, a third-round pick from Stanford, took over and threw for 102

yards with a touchdown and an interception.

Deshaun Watson was not an option to fill in in the wake of Taylor's injury after Culley said Monday that he would be inactive for Thursday's game just as he has been for the first two games.

Watson has been listed as inactive/not injury-related following his trade request and af-

ter 22 women filed lawsuits alleging sexual assault or harassment. Before Taylor was put on IR, Culley said the Texans (1-1) could explore signing another quarterback next week if Taylor remains out.

Rookie receiver Nico Collins was also placed on injured reserve Tuesday. Collins, who was a third-round pick in this year's draft, has a shoulder injury.

Big bet drives Panthers to tee off on opponents

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Carolina Panthers defensive end Brian Burns envisions himself riding around the Wofford College campus next summer at training camp in his new tricked out golf cart waving to teammates.

That will mean he has won "the bet."

Burns and new Panthers pass rusher Haason Reddick made a wager before the season on who'll have the most sacks this season. The loser buys the winner a new golf cart — with accessories — for next summer.

"I already told him how I want mine done — black and purple and all spotted out," Burns said with a laugh.

The friendly wager is providing motivation for both players as Reddick already has three sacks and Burns has two sacks entering Carolina's Week 3 Thursday night game against the Houston Texans (1-1).

"I'm keeping an eye on him," Reddick said of having Burns in the rearview mirror.

The competition is benefitting the team as well, as the Panthers' 10 sacks are tops in the league and their defense ranks No. 1 overall in total yards allowed, yards rushing and points allowed.

The bet is all in good fun, and both players are helping each other succeed.

In fact, nobody was happier with Reddick's arrival than Burns. Reddick had 12 sacks last season with the Arizona Cardinals, but opted to sign with the Panthers as a free agent, rejoining former Temple coach Matt Rhule in Carolina. His signing was meant to take some of the double teams away from Burns, who still managed nine sacks last season despite getting little help from his teammates.

When they're not talking golf carts, they're talking football — particularly getting to the quarterback.

"We constantly talk about pass rush," Reddick said. "All day, every day, every time we see each other. When we are out at practice, during the game, we constantly talk about pass rush."

"How we are being set by the tackles on each side, what worked, what didn't work. Always picking each other's brain and trying to see, OK, you use that (move) and then let me see if I can use this and beat them with this."

Said Burns: "If I see he has success with this move on this particular guy I will ask him about it and I'll try the move myself. Or if I see something I will tell him, 'Hey this didn't work because (the offensive lineman) is sitting heavy on his inside,' or whatever the case may be. It's just sharpening our IQs."

Rush to change: Big 12 no longer pass-happy league

Associated Press

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — The Big 12 is no longer considered a prolific passing league, replaced for now by a wave of ground attacks that are producing plenty of individual stars.

In every year except two from 2002 to 2018, the Big 12 had at least one quarterback exceed 4,000 passing yards. In 2012, there were four of them.

It didn't happen in the last two seasons. This year, no quarterbacks are among the top 25 in the nation in passing yards.

No one seems to miss those gunslinger days. Big 12 teams are now content with mostly handing the ball off — and carrying it far.

"It sure looks like a physical conference. Everybody plays a physical brand of football," Texas coach Steve Sarkisian said. "I don't think this is the Big 12 of old when you watch from afar. Teams believe in running the ball and stopping the run."

"The old adage of that's where the game is won and lost at the line of scrimmage is kind of what it feels like."

Numerous running backs have joined all-conference preseason picks Breece Hall of Iowa State and Bijan Robinson of Texas in grabbing early season

headlines.

Kansas State sophomore Deuce Vaughn leads the way with 371 yards, which is eighth nationally. Two Baylor players are averaging more than 100 yards per game: Abram Smith (122) and Trestan Ebner (106).

The running resurgence is becoming a team effort, too. Last weekend Texas ran for 427 yards, Baylor 307 and No. 25 Kansas State 269.

Bear attack

In three games Baylor has already surpassed last year's team rushing total. The Bears didn't have anyone rush for 100 yards in 2020. Jeff Grimes was hired from BYU as Baylor's offensive coordinator in the off-season and the Bears already have six 100-yard efforts.

"Long way to go, but I like what we've done so far," said Baylor coach Dave Aranda.

Behind Smith, Ebner and Taye McWilliams, Baylor is averaging 321 yards on the ground, which is fifth in the nation. McWilliams has a league-high 13 yards per carry.

The 217-pound Smith moved this season from linebacker to running back, where he started his career, to give the Bears a needed physical runner. He is the first Baylor running back with three consecutive 100-yard games since 2015.

NBA cracks down on luring defense into fouls

Associated Press

There was a play early last season that generated much attention around the NBA. Atlanta's Trae Young used his speed to dribble past Brooklyn's Timoth e Luwawu-Cabarrot. And as Luwawu-Cabarrot tried to catch up, Young slammed on the brakes.

Collision. Whistle. Foul on Luwawu-Cabarrot, who shrugged in disbelief.

"That's not basketball," Nets coach Steve Nash pleaded from the bench.

The NBA is apparently inclined to agree. Following suggestions from the league's competition committee, the NBA has spent time this offseason teaching its referees how to handle it when offensive players are making non-basketball moves with hopes of drawing contact from defenders—something that will

be a point of emphasis this season.

Going forward, such plays will merit either a no-call or an offensive foul.

"One of the things that we realized with a free-flowing game that's played in space is this idea that we want competitive balance," said Monty McCutchen, the NBA's senior vice president and head of referee development and training. "We want this idea that both on offense and defense, you have equal opportunities to be competitive and to compete every night ... And as the rules are written, our players are the best in the world at innovating up to the limits of those rules."

It falls under the league's "freedom of movement" rules, which became a major talking point three years ago when the NBA made players cut down on grabbing and dis-

lodging opponents — and that skewed toward helping the offense. By telling offensive players to stop making non-basketball moves to create contact with opponents, that should help defenders.

The non-basketball moves are the major focus of this week's referee preseason meetings, which run through Thursday, and the new way of officiating those moves was put into action at summer league in Las Vegas last month.

The competition committee — a group of owners, general managers, coaches and a player representative, a cross-section that ensures all points of view are heard — decided to push for changes in this particular area earlier this year. The league announced the policy change on Aug. 8.

Giants beat Padres, retain slim NL West lead

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — LaMonte Wade Jr. singled over leaping All-Star shortstop Fernando Tatis Jr. in the ninth inning to bring in the go-ahead run and the San Francisco Giants beat the staggering San Diego Padres 6-5 on Tuesday night to keep a one-game lead in the NL West.

Wade's hit was the third straight one-out single off Mark Melancon (4-3) and brought in Brandon Belt. Melancon, who leads baseball with 37 saves, started the ninth with the score tied at 5.

The Giants stayed ahead of the Dodgers in the division race after Los Angeles beat Colorado 5-4.

Cardinals 2, Brewers 1: Closer Giovanni Gallegos fanned pinch-hitter Pablo Reyes for the final out and St. Louis won its 10th straight game, increasing its playoff lead by holding off the division-leading Milwaukee.

The Cardinals increased their edge for the second NL wild-card spot to four games over Cincinnati.

Yankees 7, Rangers 1: Giancarlo Stanton lined a laser beam of a home run, Aaron Judge

added a three-run shot and New York powered past visiting Texas to keep pace in the crowded AL wild-card chase.

Joey Gallo also went deep — against his former team — and Luis Severino closed with two shutout innings in his first major league appearance since the 2019 AL Championship Series. The Yankees remained a half-game behind Toronto for the final American League playoff spot.

Blue Jays 4, Rays 2: Rookie Alek Manoah rebounded from early control issues to last six innings and Toronto won at AL East-leading Tampa Bay to improve to a major league-best 16-4 in September.

The Blue Jays maintained a half-game lead over the New York Yankees for the second AL wild card. The Rays, closing in on their second straight division title, are six games ahead of second-place Boston.

Dodgers 5, Rockies 4 (10): Pinch-hitter Albert Pujols drove in the go-ahead run with a single up the middle in the 10th inning and Los Angeles overcame a rare off night by major league wins leader Julio Ur as to win at Colorado.

The Dodgers have won nine of their last 10 to remain on the heels of San Francisco in the NL West. Los Angeles remained a game back of the Giants, who beat San Diego.

Tigers 5, White Sox 3: Akil Baddoo and Victor Reyes drove in two runs apiece and host Detroit stalled Chicago's drive for the AL Central title.

The magic number for the White Sox to clinch the division remained at two games.

Indians 4, Royals 1: Yu Chang hit a bases-loaded triple off left fielder Andrew Benintendi's glove in the first inning, leading Cal Quantrill and host Cleveland over Kansas City.

Ernie Clement homered as the second-place Indians kept Chicago's magic number for clinching the AL Central at two. Cleveland hosts the White Sox in a five-game series beginning Thursday.

Phillies 3, Orioles 2 (10): J.T. Realmuto hit a two-run triple with two outs in the 10th inning to rally Philadelphia and boost its playoff hopes.

Mariners 5, Athletics 2: Marco Gonzales pitched six uneven innings but won his eighth straight decision, and visiting Seattle moved into a tie with

Oakland in a matchup of wild-card contenders.

Braves 6, Diamondbacks 1: Austin Riley and Ozzie Albies launched two-run homers as Atlanta held its NL East lead with a win at Arizona.

Astros 10, Angels 5: Shohei Ohtani hit his 45th homer in the eighth inning, but Aledmys D az and Kyle Tucker hit back-to-back homers and drove in three runs apiece in leading Houston to a win at Los Angeles.

Twins 9, Cubs 5: Nick Gordon hit a two-run homer and two singles, Josh Donaldson and Max Kepler each had three hits and two RBIs, and visiting Minnesota dealt Chicago its fifth loss in six games.

Red Sox 6, Mets 3: Xander Bogaerts hit a go-ahead, two-run homer in the fifth inning and a two-run double in the sixth, lifting AL wild-card leading Boston over visiting New York.

Pirates 6, Reds 2: Ben Gamel homered, Ke'Bryan Hayes had three hits and visiting Pittsburgh dampened Cincinnati's fading postseason hopes.

Nationals 7, Marlins 1: Josh Rogers pitched 7 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings of one-run ball and Washington won at Miami.