

‘Fat Leonard’ boasts about Navy access

BY WYATT OLSEN
Stars and Stripes

“Fat Leonard,” the Malaysian businessman at the heart of a corruption scandal that has brought down numerous U.S. Navy officials, is set to tell all for the first time in a nine-part podcast series beginning Tuesday.

In a brief and breathless trailer for the podcast, Leonard Glenn Francis, who has pleaded guilty and is helping prosecutors in exchange for a possibly reduced sentence, brags: “I had the Navy by their balls. I turned my torpedoes, my guns, against them because they betrayed me.”

The specifics of that perceived betrayal will apparently be revealed as the podcast, titled *Fat Leonard*, unfolds. What the teaser makes clear, however, is that Francis is anything but contrite over his misdeeds.

“Everybody was in my pocket,” he says in the trailer. “I had them in my palm. I was just rolling them around,” he says with a chuckle.

Francis operated Glenn Defense Marine Asia, which contracted with the U.S. Navy to provide food, water, fuel, tugboats and sewage removal for ships and installations in the Pacific.

Francis began recruiting Navy personnel to direct contracts toward his company around 2006. He bribed them with money,

luxury items and prostitutes in return for classified information about the movement of ships and submarines in Southeast Asia, and routinely overcharged or fabricated invoices.

He pleaded guilty in federal court in January 2015 and began cooperating with investigators. He has not yet been sentenced.

“With nothing to lose, Leonard is sparing no details,” touts the podcast trailer.

In the first episode, listeners will meet the 300-pound Francis, who will talk about a troubled childhood. Episode two begins with his launching of a career as a defense contractor at age 21.

The podcast is a joint production of PRX, a nonprofit media company that specializes in audio journalism and storytelling, and Project Brazen, a firm founded by Bradley Hope and Tom Wright, former reporters at *The Wall Street Journal*.

Francis has not spoken publicly about the sprawling corruption case that has led to federal criminal charges of more than 30 people, including 10 commissioned Navy officers.

In September 2018, however, *The San Diego Union-Tribune* obtained a transcript of a deposition given by Francis in the just-concluded court-martial of Navy Cmdr. David

Morales, who had been charged with conspiracy and bribery but found guilty only of violating lawful orders and conduct unbecoming an officer.

Francis in the deposition said he was suffering from kidney cancer, out of federal prison on a medical furlough and under home confinement in San Diego. He said he was counting on receiving a lesser sentence made possible by a cooperation agreement he entered with the U.S. Justice Department.

Earlier this month, retired Marine Corps Col. Enrico DeGuzman, 63, entered a plea deal and admitted accepting \$67,000 in gourmet dining, gifts and stays at high-end hotels in exchange for steering business toward Francis.

The disgraced Marine is among nine military officers who were all charged in a 2017 federal indictment.

Among those officers was Robert Gorsuch, a retired Navy chief warrant officer, who pleaded guilty Aug. 31 to taking more than \$45,000 in bribes in exchange for sharing classified ship schedules.

The remaining seven defendants — including a rear admiral who was once the 7th Fleet intelligence chief — are scheduled for trial in federal court in February.

Navy’s tuition assistance to cover more credit hours

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Navy is expanding the number of credit hours covered by its tuition assistance program, but also raising the bar for sailors to qualify for the program, according to an announcement Tuesday.

Effective Friday, the number of credit hours the Navy pays for annually will increase from 12 to 18, according to a service-wide message from Vice Adm. John Nowell Jr., the chief of naval personnel.

“We are committed to ensuring fully qualified sailors can take advantage of this increased educational opportunity in a manner that reinforces our commitment to professionalism, warfighting, and retention,” Nowell said.

However, sailors are limited to two fund-

ed classes per fiscal quarter. They’ll also be required to have a minimum of three years of Navy service to qualify for the program, a one-year increase over previous requirements.

Nowell’s announcement made clear that sailors who previously used tuition assistance after two years of service must now wait until their third year.

Other new requirements include individual trait marks of 3.0 or greater on a sailor’s most recent evaluation or fitness report and no nonjudicial punishment or courts-martial in the past 12 months. That’s an increase of six months from the previous policy.

Additional requirements may also be implemented by commanders, Nowell said.

“Operational readiness remains our top priority,” he wrote. “As always, command-

ing officers may establish benchmark qualifications for Sailors and officers under their command, and manage off-duty education pursuit, based on current or anticipated operational commitments.”

The U.S. government offers tuition assistance for eligible service members in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and National Guard.

Of the approximately 1.4 million active-duty service members, 236,992 utilized tuition benefits between October 2019 and September 2020, according to a Sept. 3 report by the *Washington Post*. During the 2020 fiscal year, that equated to \$488 million.

The Navy’s Tuition Assistance program offers up to \$250 per semester hour, meaning qualified sailors would be covered for up to \$4,500 per year under the new policy.

N. Korea tests hypersonic missile

By **DAVID CHOI**

Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — South Korea's military said it noticed "something different" about a North Korean missile launch this week that, according to state-run media, was the successful test of a new hypersonic weapon.

The U.S. and South Korean militaries detected what appeared to be a short-range missile fired into the sea off the peninsula's eastern coast on Tuesday morning. A report the next day by Pyongyang's Korean Central News Agency described the weapon as "a top priority work" and "of great strategic significance."

Hypersonic missiles travel several times faster than the

speed of sound and are harder to intercept. KCNA did not disclose the weapon's technical specifications.

The missile "shows something different" from the North's previous launches, South Korean military officials told Stars and Stripes in a phone interview Wednesday.

The officials, speaking on the customary condition of anonymity, declined to provide additional details, noting that U.S. and South Korean intelligence agencies were still analyzing the launch.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, in an annual speech early this year, urged the country to boost its weapons program, including developing longer-range intercontinental ballistic

missiles, tactical nuclear weapons and hypersonic aircraft.

Tuesday's test "ascertained the stability of the engine as well as of missile fuel ampoules that has been introduced for the first time," the KCNA report said. "The test results proved that all the technical specifications met the design requirements."

Fuel ampoules, or airtight capsules, appear to be a "big step" for North Korea's weapons program and could reduce the time spent to launch a missile, said Jeffrey Lewis, a missile expert at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, on Twitter.

An Associated Press report Wednesday described liquid-fuel missiles as more vulnerable

than solid-fuel missiles because they must be fueled separately and taken to launch sites using trucks that can be seen by enemy satellites or other military assets.

Following the test, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in a statement said the missile launch did "not pose an immediate threat to U.S. personnel or territory."

In separate tests earlier this month, the communist regime fired a ballistic missile from a train and launched long-range cruise missiles capable of reaching Japan.

North Korea's ambassador to the United Nations, Kim Song, said Tuesday that the country's weapons program was developed purely as a defensive measure.

NATO military chief seeks boost in cyberwarfare skills

By **JOHN VANDIVER**

Stars and Stripes

The top U.S. military commander in Europe said Wednesday that NATO's continued viability will require more cyberwarfare capability to oppose unspecified adversaries seeking to undermine the alliance.

Gen. Tod Wolters, the chief of U.S. European Command and the NATO supreme allied commander, made the remark in a speech at a security forum that was held virtually and hosted by the Center for European Policy Analysis.

"Success in 21st-century warfare demands that we evolve to compete in new domains," Wolters said. He added that a rise in cyberthreats means NATO must find ways to "impose costs against malicious disinformation and behavior."

The three-day CEPA forum, titled "Renewing the Transatlantic Alliance in a Contested World," featured a range of military and political officials grappling with the challenges posed by such adversaries as Russia and China.

Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszcz-

zak, echoing Wolters, said NATO "needs new tools" to contend with Russian disinformation campaigns, which seek to cause political and social confusion in NATO member countries.

He said his country and others on NATO's eastern flank have seen an increase in hybrid attacks from the Kremlin.

"NATO's new strategic concept must pave the way for a broad spectrum of responses to the threats and challenges we face," Blaszczak said.

In the Baltics, hoax news releases from fake government emails and phony stories posted to hacked mainstream newspaper websites offer examples of recent information warfare campaigns.

Disinformation there is often focused on discrediting U.S. and NATO military efforts in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Meanwhile, NATO members also have concerns about countering Russian electronic warfare capabilities, which could compromise the ability of allies to communicate with one another in a crisis.

Retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, former head of the U.S. Army in Europe and now a

member of CEPA, said any conflict with Russia would involve operating in terrain where secured communications are under constant attack.

NATO is updating its strategic concept, which will lay out priorities in time for the next summit of member countries' heads of state in 2022.

The strategy update is coming amid questions about cohesion within the security pact. The United States' sudden and messy evacuation from Afghanistan has caused some NATO allies to question the reliability of their American partner.

Additionally, the recent nuclear submarine deal between the U.S. and Australia has caused significant strain with France, a key NATO member that was on the losing end of the deal.

But Wolters said NATO would need to be united to tackle new threats.

"Transatlantic unity and solidarity are vital to ensure the defense and security of NATO allies," he said. "We must always strive to strengthen the bond between Europe and North America, and prepare the alliance for the future."

Biden digs in to strike deal on \$3.5T plan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pressure mounting but with signs of progress, President Joe Biden is hunkering down at the White House to try to strike a deal and win over two holdout Democratic senators whose support is needed for his potentially historic \$3.5 trillion government overhaul.

With Republicans solidly opposed and no Democratic votes to spare, Biden canceled a Wednesday trip to Chicago that was to focus on COVID-19 vaccinations so he could dig in for another day of intense negotiations with lawmakers ahead of crucial

votes.

The stakes are as high as ever as Biden and his party try to accomplish a giant legislative lift, promising a vast rewrite of the nation's balance sheet with an oh-so-slim majority in Congress. His idea is to essentially raise taxes on corporations and the wealthy and use that money to expand government health care, education and other programs — an impact that would be felt in countless American lives.

In one sign of trouble ahead, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi suggested Wednesday that she might delay an expected vote Thursday on a related \$1 trillion

public works measure that centrist senators want but that progressives are threatening to defeat unless there's movement on Biden's broader package.

It's a pressure point on the senators and other centrist lawmakers to strike an agreement with Biden.

"We take it one step at a time," said Pelosi, D-Calif., to reporters at the Capitol.

"I want it to pass," Pelosi said of the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill. "So what we wanted to do is to pass tomorrow, and anything that strengthens the hand of a speaker, helps us."

At the same time, Congress is

courting a more immediate crisis. Republicans refuse to approve routine legislation to keep the government funded past Thursday's fiscal year-end and raise the nation's debt limit to avoid a dangerous default on borrowing. More votes were expected Wednesday and were likely to at least temporarily head off a catastrophe.

With Biden and his party reacting at the same time for what would be a signature policy accomplishment, there is a strong sense that progress is being made, said an administration official who requested anonymity to discuss the private talks.

Ex-diplomat Kishida likely new Japan PM

Associated Press

TOKYO — Former Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida won the governing party's leadership election on Wednesday and is set to become the next prime minister, facing the tasks of reviving a pandemic-hit economy and ensuring a strong alliance with Washington to counter growing regional security risks.

Kishida replaces outgoing party leader Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who is stepping down after serving only one year.

As new leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, Kishida is

certain to be elected the next prime minister on Monday in parliament, where his party and its coalition partner control both houses.

In his victory speech, Kishida vowed to tackle "national crises" including COVID-19, the pandemic-battered economy and the declining population and birthrate. He said he would pursue "important issues related to Japan's future" through a vision of "a free and open Indo-Pacific" that counters China's assertiveness in the region.

Kishida defeated popular vaccinations minister Taro Kono in a runoff after finishing only one

vote ahead of him in the first round, in which none of the four candidates, including two women, was able to win a majority.

In a landslide 257-170 victory in the second round, Kishida received support from party heavyweights who apparently chose stability over change advocated by Kono, who is known as something of a maverick and a reformer.

Kishida is under pressure to change the party's high-handed reputation, worsened by Suga, who angered the public over his handling of the pandemic and insistence on holding the Summer Olympics in Tokyo despite

surging infections.

The long-ruling conservative Liberal Democratic Party desperately needs to quickly turn around plunging public support ahead of lower house elections coming within two months.

Kishida said he heard many voters in the past year complaining that they were being ignored.

"I felt our democracy is in a crisis," he said in his speech. "I, Fumio Kishida, have a special skill of listening to people. I am determined to make an effort toward making a more open LDP and a bright future for Japan together with you all."

Poll: Americans prefer diplomacy to military engagement

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

Most Americans would like the United States to increase diplomatic engagement with other countries on issues such as climate change and migration, and many think Washington should scale down its military activities abroad, a new public poll showed.

Part of those military reductions should include cutting the number of U.S. troops stationed overseas, said those polled by the Eurasia Group Foundation, a New York-based

political risk consultancy.

Over 42% of respondents believed that the number of U.S. service members stationed in places like Germany, Japan and the Persian Gulf region — currently about 200,000 — should be cut, and that Washington should reduce its commitments to defend those nations.

Meanwhile, approximately 60% of those surveyed wanted the U.S. to increase its participation in international organizations and in negotiations on topics of global importance. Only about 20% said less engagement was

necessary.

Nearly 2,170 people were included in the poll. The report released Tuesday did not include a margin of error.

"As the world grapples with problems which are not easily solved with military force — such as natural disasters related to climate change and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic — this year's survey sought to gain a more granular understanding of the kinds of international engagement Americans support," said the report.

US declares ivory-billed woodpecker extinct

Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. — Death's come knocking a last time for the splendid ivory-billed woodpecker and 22 more birds, fish and other species: The U.S. government declared them extinct.

It's a rare move for wildlife officials to give up hope on a plant or animal, but government scientists say they've exhausted efforts to find these 23. And they warn climate change, on top of other pressures, could make such disappearances more common as a warming planet adds to the dangers facing imperiled plants and wildlife.

The ivory-billed woodpecker was perhaps the best known species the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Wednesday announced is extinct. It went out stubbornly and with fanfare, making unconfirmed appearanc-

es in recent decades that ignited a frenzy of ultimately fruitless searches in the swamps of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Florida.

Others such as the flat pigtoe, a freshwater mussel in the southeastern U.S., were identified in the wild only a few times and never seen again, meaning by the time they got a name they were fading from existence.

"When I see one of those really rare ones, it's always in the back of my mind that I might be the last one to see this animal again," said Anthony "Andy" Ford, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist in Tennessee who specializes in freshwater mussels.

The factors behind the disappearances vary — too much development, water pollution, logging, competition from invasive species, birds killed for feathers

and animals captured by private collectors. In each case, humans were the ultimate cause.

Another thing they share: All 23 were thought to have at least a slim chance of survival when added to the endangered species list beginning in the 1960s. Only 11 species previously have been removed due to extinction in the almost half-century since the Endangered Species Act was signed into law. Wednesday's announcement kicks off a three-month comment period before the species status changes become final.

Around the globe, some 902 species have been documented as extinct. The actual number is thought to be much higher because some are never formally identified, and many scientists warn the Earth is in an "extinction crisis" with flora and fauna now disappearing at 1,000 times the

historical rate.

It's possible one or more of the 23 species included in Wednesday's announcement could reappear, several scientists said.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature, a Switzerland-based group that tracks extinctions globally, is not putting the ivory-billed woodpecker into its extinction column because it's possible the birds still exist in Cuba, said the group's Craig Hilton-Taylor. Federal officials said the extinctions declaration was driven by a desire to clear a backlog of recommended status changes for species that had not been acted upon for years. They said it would free up resources for conservation efforts for species that still have a chance for recovery.

Since 1975, 54 species have left the endangered list after recovering, including the bald eagle.

Police: Man admits to killings, felt compelled to sacrifice

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — A man has confessed to killing three people whose dismembered bodies were found in a burning dumpster in Texas, as well as his roommate and girlfriend, saying he felt compelled to sacrifice them, authorities said Tuesday.

Jason Thornburg, 41, was arrested Monday on a capital murder charge in the deaths of the three people whose bodies were found in the dumpster in Fort Worth on Sept. 22, police said.

Surveillance footage of a vehicle at the site of the burning dumpster led them to Thornburg, an electrician's apprentice. Officers on Monday found him working in nearby Arlington, an arrest warrant said.

During an interview, Thornburg told officers that he had in-depth knowledge of the Bible and believed he was being called to "commit sacrifices," according to the arrest warrant.

Forth Worth police said Tues-

day that the bodies found in the dumpster belonged to a man and two women. Police have identified the male victim as David Lueras, 42. Police said the medical examiner would release the identifications of the women.

Thornburg, who had been staying in a motel in Euless, Texas, since late July, told officers that about five days before the bodies were discovered, Lueras had showed up at his motel room, the arrest warrant said. Thornburg told officers he cut Lueras' throat and then cut him into pieces in the bathtub, the arrest warrant said. According to the arrest warrant, about two days later he slit the throat of a woman who showed up at his room and two days after that, killed another woman who had come to the motel.

According to the arrest warrant, Thornburg's roommate had been killed in a house fire on May 21. Thornburg said he sacrificed his girlfriend in Arizona, according to the arrest warrant.

SD reviewing governor's meeting with her daughter

Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — South Dakota's attorney general said Tuesday that he is reviewing concerns from state lawmakers over a meeting Gov. Kristi Noem held last year that included both her daughter and a state employee who was overseeing her daughter's application to become a certified real estate appraiser.

"I have been contacted by concerned citizens and legislators," Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg said in a statement. "I am actively reviewing their concerns and I will be following the steps prescribed in codified law in relation to those questions."

Ravnsborg didn't immediately respond to a question about what steps he might take. The attorney general is tasked under state law with issuing legal opinions to lawmakers.

The Associated Press reported Monday that Noem held the

meeting shortly after the state agency had moved to deny her daughter the license last year. Noem's daughter eventually received her license four months later. Afterward, the state employee who directed the agency was allegedly pressured to retire by Noem's Cabinet secretary. The state employee, Sherry Bren, eventually received a \$200,000 payment from the state to withdraw the complaint and leave her job.

Ethics experts said the episode raised concerns that the governor had abused the power of her office.

The governor's office declined to answer detailed questions from the AP, and Noem's spokesman dismissed the AP's report as a political attack on the governor.

Noem, 49, is seen among a handful of early GOP hopefuls for the White House in 2024. She is in her first term as governor after nearly a decade in Congress.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

A shell of a trip: Sea turtle flown by private jet

FL MARATHON — A large loggerhead sea turtle rehabilitated at the Florida Keys-based Turtle Hospital was flown by private plane Sunday to live at a conservation facility in Texas.

The 230-pound female turtle took the nearly five-hour flight from the Middle Keys to South Padre Island, Texas, with the help of “Turtles Fly Too,” a nonprofit group that works with general aviation pilots who donate their aircraft, fuel and time to provide emergency transport for endangered species.

Matthew, named for one of her rescuers before her sex was determined, suffered injuries to her shell in May 2020 from a boat strike that left her unable to dive and forage for food — a condition termed “bubble butt syndrome” by the hospital’s rehabilitation staff.

The reptile joins other rehabilitated, non-releasable turtle patients at Sea Turtle Inc., located on the Gulf of Mexico.

Matthew’s carapace has been fitted with weights, fashioned to adhere to the shell and help the turtle submerge and rest comfortably during her residency at the Texas center.

Window fixes set for century-old library

SC BEAUFORT — Crews are getting ready to start restoring windows in a century-old building in Beaufort that were damaged by hurricanes over the past several years.

The work on the 29 windows of the Carnegie Library building is being paid for through a \$188,000 federal grant, The Island Packet of Hilton Head reported.

Work is expected to start in October and last six months. The windows were damaged when Hurri-

cane Matthew passed just offshore in 2016 and Hurricane Irma in 2017.

Beaufort officials also hired a building preservation expert to look at the entire former library and provide an estimate for any other work needed to preserve it.

The library in downtown Beaufort is one of 14 in South Carolina and more than 1,600 public libraries across the United States funded by steel industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie.

The old library now houses the Beaufort/Port Royal Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Fall fire season starts Friday in West Virginia

WV CHARLESTON — Fall fire season gets underway this week in West Virginia, with limits set on outdoor burning through the end of the year.

Starting Friday, burning vegetation and other naturally occurring material is limited to the hours of 5 p.m. to 7 a.m., the Division of Forestry said.

A 10-foot safety area around the fire must be cleared to dirt level. Fires must be attended at all times, and open fires must be 50 feet away from structures, the division said.

Violation of burning laws can result in a fine of up to \$1,000.

Commercial burning permits from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. are available from local Division of Forestry offices.

Rockford Peaches site may house museum

IL ROCKFORD — The northern Illinois city that figured prominently in the movie “A League of Their Own” may be getting a museum of its own.

The Rockford Zoning Board of Appeals voted unanimously this week to grant a special-use permit to build a \$10 million International

Women’s Baseball Museum at Beyer Park on the city’s southeast side, the Rockford Register Star reported.

The city and the league gained international fame in 1992 when the movie starring Tom Hanks, Geena Davis and Madonna was released.

At the park, Beyer Stadium was the actual home of the real Rockford Peaches of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League in the 1940s and 1950s.

To put the museum on the site, the Rockford Park District, which owns Beyer Park, plans to sell an acre of land at the north end of the park to the International Women’s Baseball Center.

Parish Sheriff’s Office to start selling firewood

LA ALEXANDRIA — Next month, people can order firewood from the Rapides Parish Sheriff’s Office and in the process help out the community and inmates.

Sheriff Mark Wood has started a firewood project that can help recycle the many trees felled by recent hurricanes and winter storms.

Priority for the wood will go to elderly and disabled residents of the parish, but anyone can buy up to two ricks beginning Oct. 1. Each rick costs \$60, and sales are handled with money orders only.

Money from the fund is “used to purchase basketballs and other sports equipment and work clothes or work boots for those inmates who have an economic need,” according to a news release.

Racing motorcycle kills bicyclist, police say

FL ORLANDO — A Florida woman was fatally injured when a racing motorcycle hit her bicycle, officials said.

The crash occurred Sunday afternoon near Orlando, according

to a Florida Highway Patrol report.

A Suzuki motorcycle and a white BMW were racing along a major thoroughfare, witnesses told troopers. A 37-year-old woman on a bicycle was attempting to cross when the motorcycle hit her.

The woman and the 27-year-old man on the motorcycle were taken to a nearby hospital.

The man suffered serious injuries, and the woman died, officials said.

Investigators said they’re looking for the driver of the BMW, who left the scene of the crash.

The crash report didn’t say whether the motorcycle rider would face any charges.

New rules could allow building closer to dunes

GA ST. SIMONS ISLAND — Leaders on one of Georgia’s most popular coastal islands are considering letting developers build closer to sand dunes.

The Brunswick News reported that a planning commission that governs construction on St. Simons Island is discussing reducing the required setback for new construction in areas with active dunes from 40 feet to 25 feet.

The new rule would increase the required setback from 20 feet to 25 feet for an area without dunes.

Commissioners agreed Tuesday to postpone action until November to allow time for a public workshop. The idea originated from a planning commission meeting with Glynn County commissioners to discuss growth on the island.

Glynn County Commissioner Cap Fendig said the proposed changes would match Georgia Department of Natural Resources rules. Current Glynn County rules are more restrictive.

Dunes can protect beaches and inland areas and also provide habitat for plants and wildlife.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

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

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Ohtani ends big season hungry to win

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Shohei Ohtani pitched seven innings of one-run ball in his final game at Angel Stadium this season, striking out 10 Mariners amid the serenades of “M-V-P!” that have been the soundtrack to his summer.

Yet he left the mound with the score tied because his Los Angeles Angels teammates couldn’t score more than one run, denying Ohtani a chance for his 10th victory. When the Angels’ bullpen took over, its first two relievers swiftly surrendered four runs to playoff-contending Seattle in a 5-1 loss.

That sunny Sunday in Orange County neatly exemplified the gloomy context around the sensational season put together by Ohtani, a two-way superstar without precedent in the modern game.

Heading into the final week, Ohtani has 45 homers and 98 RBIs as a designated hitter along with a 3.18 ERA and 156 strikeouts on the mound. He is both one of the best pitchers and one of the best hitters in the

major leagues, and he is widely expected to win his first AL MVP award this fall.

But baseball won’t get to enjoy Ohtani’s talents in the post-season because he plays for the Angels, a big-budget franchise mired in six consecutive losing seasons and seven straight non-playoff seasons, including all four of Ohtani’s stateside campaigns. The Halos’ loss to Seattle in their home finale was their 82nd of the season, officially extending the majors’ longest active streak of losing.

“It’s very frustrating, very disappointing,” Ohtani said through his interpreter, Ippei Mizuhara. “I always look forward to being in the playoff race at the end. I always think about that.”

The Angels have two works of baseball art, and owner Arte Moreno has hung them in a dingy, derelict gallery: Mike Trout has won two of his three MVP awards during the Angels’ six-year losing skid, and Ohtani is likely to win the third.

Ohtani is tied to the Angels for two more seasons under the

terms of his move from Japan to the majors in late 2017, but he hasn’t had extension talks with the franchise beyond 2023. It’s a bit too early to predict his future, but Ohtani clearly wants the Angels to get better soon — and he is unafraid to say it.

“I really like the team, I love the fans and the atmosphere of the team,” Ohtani said. “But more than that, I want to win. That’s the biggest thing for me. So I’ll leave it at that.”

Ohtani was the third prominent member of the Angels in the past week to publicly call out the team’s personnel failures, particularly on a pitching staff that has been one of the majors’ lousiest for years.

Trout, who hasn’t played since May due to a nagging calf injury, and manager Joe Maddon both condemned the Halos’ largely ineffective roster-building work in recent years under two general managers.

“This can’t continue to go on,” Maddon said. “We can’t annually be in this position. This organization is better than that. We deserve better than that.”

Maddon said Tuesday that Ohtani’s comments about wanting to win don’t mean the two-way star wants to leave the organization when he becomes a free agent after the 2023 season.

“We all feel the same way, we all want to win,” Maddon said before the Angels’ game at Texas. “If anybody misconstrues that as though he wants to leave, that’s trying to connect some dots that weren’t necessarily what he, not at all what he said.

“He also mentioned how much he loves it here. The inner sanctum of the clubhouse, the guys, the coaching staff, everything about it. The area. The fans. He loves them all. We all want to get to the next level, and we see it as an absolute possibility it’s going to happen here in the very near future.”

Four years after Ohtani chose the Angels, he has already played for three managers and two general managers. He still won the AL Rookie of the Year award before battling back from Tommy John surgery to become a unique star.

Cardinals stretch winning streak to 17 games

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Nolan Arenado came to the St. Louis Cardinals expecting to play into October.

After reaching the postseason twice during eight years with Colorado, Arenado will go to the playoffs in his first season with St. Louis.

Arenado, Dylan Carlson, and Jose Rondon homered to back Adam Wainwright, and the Cardinals extended their winning streak to 17 games and clinched an NL wild card berth with a 6-2 win over the Milwaukee Brewers on Tuesday night.

“To be able to go the playoffs is what it’s all about,” Arenado said. “This team is unbelievable. We carry each other. I’m

happy to be a part of it. This is why I’m here — to get a chance to play in the playoffs and to be able to do in my first year here is a great feeling.”

St. Louis will play in the NL wild-card game on Oct. 6 at the Los Angeles Dodgers or San Francisco, whichever does not win the NL West. The postseason trip will be the third in a row for the Cardinals.

“We feel dangerous,” Wainwright said. “There have been a couple times where to start the postseason I go, ‘This team could do it.’ We have a team that can do it.”

Milwaukee already was assured of the NL Central title.

St. Louis was 71-69 on Sept.

11 before the winning streak, the longest in team history and the longest in the major leagues since Cleveland took 22 in a row in 2017. The Cardinals are on the longest winning streak from Sept. 1 on since the 1935 Chicago Cubs won 21 in a row.

“I’ve never been a part of a group that just keeps coming,” Arenado said. “We’ve had lost some bad games this year and you would think that’s the end of it, but we just keep fighting.”

That’s what has impressed St. Louis manager Mike Shildt.

“People say, ‘How do you stay so optimistic about this team?’ Really it’s not blind optimism. I am an optimist by nature,” Shildt said. “I think they

live longer. It’s an easier team to believe in and have that faith in when I have the privilege of being able to see behind the season the dedication that takes place every day and the intentionality this group has together for a common goal and that’s to celebrate the very last game of Major League Baseball.”

Wainwright (17-7) allowed two runs and seven hits in six innings, throwing 102 pitches and stranding seven runners. Wainwright has won six consecutive decisions for the Cardinals and 10 of his last 11. He is 4-0 in September and improved to 2-1 in four starts against the Brewers this season.

Braves edge Phils, close in on NL East title

Associated Press

ATLANTA — A dominant late-September performance by Charlie Morton left the Atlanta Braves hoping it was a preview of October postseason starts to come.

Morton threw seven scoreless innings, Jorge Soler hit a two-run single and the Braves escaped a ninth-inning jam to beat the Philadelphia Phillies 2-1 on Tuesday night and move closer to their fourth consecutive NL East title.

“It’s exactly why we hired him, pretty much,” Braves manager Brian Snitker said. “The moment doesn’t get too big, I know that, for him.”

Atlanta reduced its magic number to three games in the division race. The loss eliminated Philadelphia from contention for an NL wild card.

“We have to win out,” Phillies first baseman Brad Miller said. “I think it’s cut and dried.”

Even winning out may not be enough for Philadelphia, which still needs the New York Mets to beat the Braves in the final regular-season series.

Yankees 7, Blue Jays 2: Giancarlo Stanton hit a three-run home run, Aaron Judge homered and visiting New York beat Toronto to extend its lead atop the AL wild-card stand-

ings.

Gio Urshela added a solo homer and Anthony Rizzo had a pair of hits and drove in a run as New York won its seventh straight and moved two games in front of Boston in the wild-card race.

Judge’s 37th homer of the season in the third gave the Yankees at least one home run in 19 consecutive games, extending their season-high streak.

Orioles 4, Red Sox 2: Rookie Ryan Mountcastle hit his 32nd home run to help host Baltimore rally past Chris Sale and stall Boston’s bid to enhance its playoff position.

Boston lost its fourth straight but remained a game ahead of Toronto for the second AL wild card. The Yankees lead the wild-card race.

Mariners 4, Athletics 2: Mitch Haniger hit the 100th home run of his career and third in two games, and host Seattle pulled within a half-game of the second AL wild card berth with a win over Oakland.

Astros 4, Rays 3: Tampa Bay’s JT Chargois walked two batters with the bases loaded in the ninth inning as host Houston snapped a four-game skid and moved closer to securing a postseason berth.

Alex Bregman and Jose Altuve homered for the Astros.

Dodgers 2, Padres 1: Walker Buehler tossed seven shutout innings to earn a career-best 15th victory, and host Los Angeles defeated San Diego.

Giants 6, Diamondbacks 4: Wilmer Flores hit a go-ahead, bases-loaded single in his team’s four-run sixth inning, and host San Francisco beat Arizona to maintain a two-game NL West lead over rival Los Angeles.

Royals 6, Indians 4: Salvador Perez hit his major league-leading 47th home run and host Kansas City beat Cleveland.

Perez also leads the majors in RBIs (118). He trails Jorge Soler (2019) by one for the club record in homers.

White Sox 7, Reds 1: Luis Robert homered twice, Reynaldo Lopez pitched two-hit ball for a season-high six innings, and host Chicago beat Cincinnati.

The Reds had won four straight but were knocked out of the NL playoff hunt midgame when the St. Louis Cardinals beat Milwaukee to lock up the second wild card.

The AL Central champion White Sox have won three straight.

Mets 5-2, Marlins 2-1: Noah

Syndergaard looked sharp in his brief but long-awaited return from Tommy John surgery, and host New York swept a doubleheader against Miami.

In the opener, Francisco Lindor homered and drove in three runs to help the Mets stop a five-game losing streak. Marcus Stroman (10-13) went five innings for his 10th win.

Syndergaard started the nightcap and threw nine of 10 pitches for strikes in a perfect first inning.

Pirates 8, Cubs 6: Colin Moran hit a three-run homer and drove in four runs as host Pittsburgh rallied to hand Chicago its seventh straight loss.

Rockies 3, Nationals 1: Kyle Freeland efficiently pitched into the seventh inning before running into trouble, Trevor Story lined a long solo homer and host Colorado beat Washington.

Twins 3, Tigers 2: Miguel Sano homered and Minnesota pitchers shut down visiting Detroit until the ninth inning.

Rangers 5, Angels 2: Rookie Andy Ibanez’s two-run single highlighted a four-run second inning for his team and fellow rookie A.J. Alexy won for the third time in four career starts as the host Texas beat Los Angeles.

Protocols tougher for unvaccinated NBA players

Associated Press

The NBA released tentative health and safety protocols to its teams Tuesday, detailing how unvaccinated players will be tested far more often than their vaccinated colleagues and face a slew of other restrictions.

Among the rules for unvaccinated players: They will not be able to eat in the same room with vaccinated teammates or staff, must have lockers as far away from vaccinated players as possible, and must stay masked and at least 6 feet away from all other

attendees in any team meeting.

Further, unvaccinated players will be “required to remain at their residence when in their home market,” teams were told in the draft of the rules, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press. They will also need to stay on team hotel properties when on the road. In both cases, there are limited permissible exceptions — such as going to buy groceries, taking children to school and the like.

And unvaccinated players also will not be permitted to visit

“higher-risk settings,” the NBA said, such as restaurants, bars, clubs, entertainment venues and large indoor gatherings.

The league is working with the National Basketball Players Association to finalize the protocols, but some details were agreed upon weeks ago — including provisions where unvaccinated players will be tested on all practice, travel, team activity and game days. Fully vaccinated players will not be subject to testing, with very limited exceptions.

Fully vaccinated players — the category that at least 90% of the league falls into — will largely be back to business as usual. Unvaccinated players will be given rapid tests on days where teams are practicing, traveling, or having similar team events.

“A vaccine mandate for NBA players would need an agreement with the Players Association,” NBA spokesman Mike Bass said Tuesday. “The NBA has made these proposals but the players’ union has rejected any vaccination requirement.”

Burrow, Meyer to meet as pros this time

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Joe Burrow didn't play much in three years under Urban Meyer at Ohio State.

But there is still much mutual respect and admiration, so much so that Meyer, as a rookie NFL coach, went to Burrow for advice last spring about how to handle his new quarterback, top overall draft pick Trevor Lawrence.

"I just wanted to talk to a guy who was in that position in recent history," the Jacksonville Jaguars coach said Monday. "We talked several times throughout the spring, just about what I could do — what we could do — to help our rookie quarterback."

Burrow is the unflappable second-year quarterback who is having a franchise built around him in Cincinnati. Meyer, returning to Ohio for the first time as an NFL head

coach with the 0-3 Jaguars, will be on the opposite sideline at Paul Brown Stadium for a Thursday night game.

Burrow came to Columbus as an unheralded recruit in the 2015 class and languished on the depth chart until transferring to LSU and eventually winning the Heisman Trophy and a national championship.

Burrow never really got a chance to be the guy at Ohio State, but he credits Meyer with having an important hand in his early development, even if the treatment was at times unpleasant.

"He was really hard on me, and it made me a better player and better person," Burrow said.

"What he does is, when he gets a new player, he tries to put them in a very intense situation to see how they respond, to see if he can trust that player," Burrow said. "He

really did that to me early in my career. I really wasn't sure why it was happening. But then as I got older and more mature, I really understood why he was doing it, and it did make me better."

Burrow in his senior year in high school was voted by writers as the best football player in Ohio. But it was seeing his relentlessness on the basketball court that made an impression on Meyer.

"He arguably has one of the best mindsets I've ever seen in an athlete," Meyer said. "Even when he struggled early in his career, one thing you could count on is, that guy is tough as nails, a competitor. Refused to lose at anything."

Burrow's dad, Jimmy, was the defensive coordinator for Ohio University under Frank Solich at the time. Joe was a two-sport star at Athens High in southeastern Ohio.

"He'll tell you he was highly recruited — he wasn't," Meyer said with a smirk.

Burrow had a frustrating three years at Ohio State. When it looked as if he would be in line to back up four-year starter J.T. Barrett in 2017, he broke his hand in the preseason. Dwayne Haskins passed him, won the Michigan game in relief of the injured Barrett and was the favorite to start in 2018.

With his Ohio State diploma in hand and two years of eligibility remaining, Burrow transferred to LSU that summer. He made college football history with his stats in 2019 and became the top overall draft pick by the Bengals in 2020.

His Heisman speech, during which he talked about poverty in his rural hometown, inspired \$650,000 in donations to the Athens food bank.

Boxing great Pacquiao announces retirement

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Boxing legend Manny Pacquiao is officially hanging up his gloves.

The eight-division world champion and Philippine senator on Wednesday announced his retirement from the ring.

"I would like to thank the whole world, especially the Filipino people, for supporting Manny Pacquiao. Goodbye, boxing," the 42-year-old said in a video posted on his Facebook page. "It is difficult for me to accept that my time as a boxer is over. Today I am announcing my retirement."

Pacquiao finished his 26-year, 72-fight career with 62 wins, eight losses and two draws. Of those 62 wins, 39 were by knockout and 23 by decision. He won 12 world titles and is the only fighter in history to win titles in eight different

weight classes.

His retirement from boxing followed a disheartening defeat to Yordenis Ugas in Paradise, Nev., on Aug. 21. The younger Cuban boxer beat Pacquiao by a unanimous decision, retaining his WBA welterweight title. It was Pacquiao's first fight in more than two years.

"Thank you for changing my life. When my family was desperate, you gave us hope, you gave me the chance to fight my way out of poverty," Pacquiao said in the video. "Because of you, I was able to inspire people all over the world. Because of you I have been given the courage to change more lives."

Pacquiao had hinted at retirement recently. It had also been expected because he is setting his sights on a bigger political battlefield. Earlier this month, he accepted his political party's nomination and declared he

will run for Philippines president in elections next May.

He has accused the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte, his former ally, of making corruption worse in the Philippines. He promised to fight poverty and warned corrupt politicians they will soon end up in jail.

Pacquiao's rags-to-riches life story and legendary career brought honor to his Southeast Asian nation, where he is known by the monikers Pacman, People's Champ and National Fist.

He left his impoverished home in the southern Philippines as a teenager and stowed away on a ship bound for Manila. He made his professional boxing debut as a junior flyweight in 1995 at the age of 16, fighting his way out of abject poverty to become one of the world's highest-paid athletes.

Eddie Banaag, a 79-year-old retiree, said Pacquiao was his idol as a boxer and he watched almost all of his fights. But he believes the boxing icon should have retired earlier.

"He should have done that right after his victory over (Keith) Thurman," Banaag said of Pacquiao's win over Thurman on July 20, 2019, in Las Vegas, Pacquiao's second-to-last fight. "It would have been better if he ended his boxing career with a win rather than a loss."

Still, Pacquiao believes he will always be remembered as a winner.

Hundreds of millions of dollars in career earnings and his record in the ring leave no doubt.

"I will never forget what I have done and accomplished in my life," Pacquiao said Wednesday. "I just heard the final bell. The boxing is over."