

# STARS AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## Navy eyes new generation of destroyers

*Associated Press*

BATH, Maine — The U.S. Navy's workhorse destroyer went into production more than 30 years ago, when Tom Stevens was a young welder.

Now, the Navy is getting ready to turn the page as it looks to a future ship brimming with lasers that can shoot down missiles and attack enemies with hypersonic missiles topping 3,800 mph.

Stevens, 52, said the warship provides an opportunity to build something new after a historic production run of the Arleigh Burke class.

"It will be an impressive destroyer that will absolutely launch us into the next generation of ships," said Stevens, director of ground assembly at Navy shipbuilder Bath Iron Works.

The stakes are high when it comes to a replacement for the backbone of the fleet as the Navy faces a growing threat from China, whose numerical advantage becomes greater each year.

The first design contracts were awarded this summer to General Dynamics' Bath Iron Works in Maine and Huntington Ingalls Industries in Mississippi for a large surface warship that would eventually follow production of the ubiquitous Burke destroyers.

All of that warfighting gear won't come cheap. The average cost of each new vessel, dubbed DDG(X), is projected to be a third more expensive than Burkes, the latest of which cost about \$2.2 billion apiece, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

The Navy has vowed that it won't repeat recent shipbuilding debacles when it rushed production and crammed too much new tech into ships, leading to delays and added expense with littoral combat ships, stealthy Zumwalt-class destroyers, and the USS Gerald Ford aircraft carrier.

"Rather than tying the success of DDG(X) to developmental technology, we're using known, mature technologies on a flexible platform that can be upgraded for decades to come, as the technology of tomorrow is matured and demonstrated," said Jamie Koehler, a Navy spokesperson.

A shipyard in Wisconsin started construction last week of the first in a new class of frigates, which are smaller than destroyers. Those ships used an existing design, and there are no new weapon systems.

Still, there continues to be concern about the destroyer's cost. A high price tag would reduce the number of ships the Navy can afford to build, said Bryan Clark, defense analyst at the Hudson Institute.

"You'll end up with the surface fleet that, instead of growing, it would be shrinking," Clark said.

Production of the new ship is still years away.

For now, shipyards continue to produce Burke-class destroyers, which earned a spot in the record book for a production run that has outlasted every other battleship, cruiser, destroyer and frigate in U.S. Navy history. By the time the last Burke is built, it could surpass even the Nimitz aircraft carrier, which had a four-decade production run.

At Bath Iron Works, shipbuilders have worked nearly exclusively on Burkes, save for the three Zumwalt-class destroyers, and they have a backlog that'll carry through the end of the decade.

Shipfitter Tim Garland, 57, started work in 1988 on the first Arleigh Burke destroyer, making ballistic doors and hatches. Over the years, he's worked on just about every component of the ship, during freezing winter days and steamy hot summer days.

The shipfitter never figured that the same ship — upgraded over the years — would enjoy such longevity.

"We figured there would be a replacement ship well before now. But if it ain't broke. Don't fix it," he said.

## Shelling resumes near nuclear plant in Ukraine

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Shelling resumed near Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant with the warring sides trading blame again on Wednesday, a day after the U.N. atomic watchdog agency pressed for a safe zone there to prevent a catastrophe.

Russian forces fired rockets and heavy artillery on the city of Nikopol, on the opposite bank of the Dnieper River from Europe's largest nuclear plant, regional Gov. Valentyn Reznichenko said.

"There are fires, blackouts and other things at the (plant) that force us to prepare the local population for the consequences of the nuclear danger," Reznichenko said. Officials in recent days have distributed iodine pills to residents to help protect them in the event of a ra-

diation leak.

In Enerhodar, where the power plant is located, Dmytro Orlov, the pre-occupation mayor, reported the city coming under Russian attack for a second time Wednesday and was without power. "Employees of communal and other services simply do not have time to complete emergency and restoration work, as another shelling reduces their work to zero," he said on the Telegram messaging app.

The Russian side blamed the Ukrainians. Vladimir Rogov, the head of the Russia-installed Enerhodar administration, said on Telegram that heavy Ukrainian fighting had caused the city's blackout, and Russia's Defense Ministry blamed the outage on Ukrainian forces attacking a power substation.

Russian rockets on Wednesday hit the vil-

lage of Mala Tokmachka some 55 miles north-east of Enerhodar, killing three people and injuring five, Zaporizhzhia regional Gov. Oleksandr Starukh reported.

It's not possible to independently reconcile the conflicting reports of the fighting, which has caused international alarm.

The head of the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Grossi, warned the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday that "something very, very catastrophic could take place" at the Zaporizhzhia plant. The IAEA urged Russia and Ukraine to establish a "nuclear safety and security protection zone" around the plant.

The fear is that the fighting could trigger a disaster on the scale of the Chernobyl disaster in Ukraine in 1986.

# Nuke document part of Mar-a-Lago stash

*The Washington Post*

A document describing a foreign government's military defenses, including its nuclear capabilities, was found by FBI agents who searched former President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence and private club last month, according to people familiar with the matter, underscoring concerns among U.S. intelligence officials about classified material stashed in the Florida property.

Some of the seized documents detail top-secret U.S. operations so closely guarded that many senior national security officials are kept in the dark about them. Only the president, some members of his Cabinet or a near-Cabinet level official could authorize other government officials to know details of these special access programs, according to people familiar with the search, who

spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe sensitive details of an ongoing investigation.

Documents about such highly classified operations require special clearances on a need-to-know basis, not just top-secret clearance. Some special-access programs can have as few as a couple dozen government personnel authorized to know of an operation's existence. Records that deal with such programs are kept under lock and key, almost always in a secure compartmented information facility, with a designated control officer to keep careful tabs on their location. But such documents were stored at Mar-a-Lago, with uncertain security, more than 18 months after Trump left the White House.

After months of trying, according to government court filings, the FBI has recovered more

than 300 classified documents from Mar-a-Lago this year: 184 in a set of 15 boxes sent to the National Archives and Records Administration in January, 38 more handed over by a Trump lawyer to investigators in June, and more than 100 additional documents unearthed in a court-approved search on Aug. 8.

It was in this last batch of government secrets, the people familiar with the matter said, that the information about a foreign government's nuclear-defense readiness was found. These people did not identify the foreign government in question, say where at Mar-a-Lago the document was found or offer additional details about one of the Justice Department's most sensitive national security investigations.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence is conduct-

ing a risk assessment to determine how much potential harm was posed by the removal from government custody of hundreds of classified documents.

The Washington Post previously reported that FBI agents who searched Trump's home were looking, in part, for any classified documents relating to nuclear weapons. After that story published, Trump compared it on social media to previous government investigations into his conduct.

"Nuclear weapons issue is a Hoax, just like Russia, Russia, Russia was a Hoax, two Impeachments were a Hoax, the Mueller investigation was a Hoax, and much more. Same sleazy people involved," he wrote, going on to suggest that the FBI might have planted evidence against him.

## Report: Many elected officials, soldiers on Oath Keepers list

*Associated Press*

The names of hundreds of U.S. law enforcement officers, elected officials and military members appear on the leaked membership rolls of a far-right extremist group that's accused of playing a key role in the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, according to a report released Wednesday.

The Anti-Defamation League Center on Extremism pored over more than 38,000 names on leaked Oath Keepers membership lists and identified more than 370 people it believes currently work in law enforcement agencies and more than 100 people who are currently members of the military.

It also identified more than 80 people who were running for or served in public office as of early August. The membership

information was compiled into a database published by the transparency collective Distributed Denial of Secrets.

"Even for those who claimed to have left the organization when it began to employ more aggressive tactics in 2014, it is important to remember that the Oath Keepers have espoused extremism since their founding, and this fact was not enough to deter these individuals from signing up," the report says.

Appearing in the Oath Keepers' database doesn't prove that a person was ever an active member of the group or shares its ideology. Some people on the list contacted by The Associated Press said they were briefly members years ago and are no longer affiliated with the group. Some said they were never dues-paying members.

## 'Fat Leonard' escape fits his brazen bribery case

*Associated Press*

SAN DIEGO — Three weeks before he faced sentencing, the Malaysian defense contractor at the center of one of the biggest bribery investigations in U.S. military history made an escape as stunning and brazen as the case itself: U-Haul trucks were seen at his home in a stylish San Diego neighborhood before Leonard Glenn Francis, known as "Fat Leonard," snipped off his ankle monitor and disappeared.

Nearly a dozen U.S. law enforcement agencies were searching for Francis on Tuesday. But officials acknowledged he may already be in Mexico, and possibly on his way back to Asia.

Four years ago, U.S. District Court Judge Janis Sammartino feared Francis might run off when she turned down his law-

yer's request to allow him to be under house arrest without round-the-clock security guards watching the ailing defense contractor. At the time, Francis was cooperating with prosecutors as they pursued charges against dozens of Navy officials who accepted bribes in exchange for classified information that gave Francis' ship servicing business in Asia an edge in getting military contracts.

The U.S. Attorney's office in San Diego declined to comment, referring calls to the U.S. Marshals Service. Supervisory Deputy U.S. Marshal Omar Castillo said his officers found no security officers at the home when they arrived Sunday, nearly seven hours after Francis is believed to have removed his ankle monitor. The device was found in the home.

# Calif. endures heat wave; no rolling blackouts

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — A brutal Western heat wave brought California to the verge of ordering rolling blackouts, but the state's electrical grid managed to handle record-breaking demand.

The state's 39 million people were warned Tuesday that demand — some of it from people cranking up the air conditioning — might outstrip supply as temperatures in many areas soared past 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The California Independent System Operator, which oversees the electrical grid, issued a

Stage 3 emergency power alert — one step below ordering utilities to start rotating outages to ease the strain on the system. The move allowed it to draw on emergency power sources.

Demand swelled in the late afternoon and into the evening, with everyone from Gov. Gavin Newsom to the state's legal marijuana business control agency urging people to turn off lights and reduce power or use backup generators.

CAISO said the peak electricity demand Tuesday hit 52,061 megawatts, far above the previous high of 50,270 megawatts

set on July 24, 2006.

While there were no rolling blackouts over large areas, two outages were reported in the San Francisco Bay Area cities of Palo Alto and Alameda, affecting several thousand customers for about an hour.

Demand fell as evening fell and businesses closed, and it dropped sharply after CAISO sent out a message on its mobile phone app asking customers to cut back their use, warning that “power interruptions may occur unless you take action.”

The Stage 3 alert ended at 8 p.m. without major rotating out-

ages. CAISO tweeted that “consumer conservation played a big part in protecting electric grid reliability.”

Even without intentional blackouts, however, tens of thousands of people found themselves without power in Northern California.

Some 35,700 people lost electricity in Silicon Valley and southern and inland areas of the San Francisco Bay Area and most of the outages were heat-related, Jason King of Pacific Gas & Electric said Tuesday evening. There was no word on when power would resume.

## Students in Miss. capital back on campus amid water crisis

AP/Report for America

JACKSON, Miss. — While its water crisis continued, students in Mississippi's capital were able to return to class for the first time in a week Tuesday with assurances that the toilets and sinks in their buildings would finally work. Jackson remained under a boil water advisory, but the drop in water pressure that had brought the system to near collapse appeared to be resolved, officials said.

Sherwin Johnson, a spokesperson for Jackson Public Schools, confirmed in a statement to The Associated Press on Tuesday that schools had reopened after a drop in water pressure forced a move to virtual instruction.

A line of cars snaked around the block in front of Spann Elementary in northeast Jackson as parents arrived to pick up their children. Syreeta Tatum waited for her fourth-grader to emerge from the building and la-

mented the uncertainty Jackson's water woes had foisted upon parents and students.

“It was very frustrating,” said Tatum. “As a mother, you want to make sure your child is getting the best education possible, especially knowing that my child functions better in person.”

In a statement posted to Twitter on Monday, the school district said it had “checked water pressure at each school” and found that “nearly all are suitable” for students and staff to return. Air conditioning systems at several schools depend on the water system to run effectively. The district said it anticipated delays in cooling buildings as temperatures reached the mid-80s on Tuesday.

“We are continuing to monitor and have portable fans and air conditioners to reduce temperatures in warm or hot areas,” Johnson said.

Torrential rains and flooding of the Pearl River in late August exacerbated problems at one of Jackson's two treatment plants, leading to a drop in pressure throughout the city. The school district said Forest Hill High School in south Jackson still didn't have water pressure. Johnson said students who attend Forest Hill were transported to alternative sites Tuesday.

In a Tuesday news conference, Jackson Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba said the water storage that was built over the weekend has decreased some over the past 24 hours.

“The safety net that has been built up has decreased and has diminished,” Lumumba said. “That is why we're prayerful that everything remains consistent.”

If a challenge arises with plant operation Tuesday, it will likely impact customers, the mayor said.

## Juul to pay nearly \$440M to settle states' teen vaping probe

Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. — Electronic cigarette maker Juul Labs has agreed to pay nearly \$440 million to settle a two-year investigation by 33 states into the marketing of its high-nicotine vaping products, which have long been blamed for sparking a national surge in teen vaping.

Connecticut Attorney General William Tong announced the deal Tuesday on behalf of the states plus Puerto Rico, which

joined together in 2020 to probe Juul's early promotions and claims about the benefits of its technology as a smoking alternative.

The settlement, which includes numerous restrictions on how Juul can market its products, resolves one of the biggest legal threats facing the beleaguered company, which still faces nine separate lawsuits from other states. Juul also faces hundreds of personal lawsuits

brought on behalf of teenagers and others who have said they became addicted to the company's vaping products.

The states' investigation found that Juul marketed its e-cigarettes to underage teens with launch parties, product giveaways and ads and social media posts using youthful models, according to a statement.

“I'm under no illusions and cannot claim that it will stop youth vaping,” Tong said at a

news conference at his Hartford office, “but we have essentially taken a big chunk out of what was once a market leader, and by their conduct, a major offender.”

“We remain focused on our future as we fulfill our mission to transition adult smokers away from cigarettes — the number one cause of preventable death — while combating underage use,” the company said in a statement.

# Abortion floor debate splits South Carolina Republicans

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — South Carolina's looming Senate debate on an abortion ban that would no longer include exceptions for pregnancies caused by rape or incest is likely to feature Republicans facing off against each other Wednesday.

On one side is a core group that views any abortion as ending a life. On the other are conservatives who have digested developments elsewhere since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned and have said they don't want 14-year-old rape victims to have to give birth, or force a mother to carry to term a fetus unable to live outside the womb.

Debate on the Senate floor started Wednesday morning. Senators have been told the proceedings could last days, although they have recently tried to conclude such debates in marathon one-day sessions. If the legislation is approved and signed into law, South Carolina would join Indiana as states that have passed near-total abortion bans since the Supreme Court

overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June.

In the first hour of debate, all three Republican women in the Senate rose to speak against the bill unless the rape and incest exceptions are restored.

"Are we simply baby machines? Are you pregnant with a dead baby? Too bad. Raped at 11 by your grandfather and got pregnant? That's just too bad," Sen. Penry Gustafson said.

Gustafson watched as the Senate's longest serving woman, Katrina Shealy, said the 41 men in the Senate would be better off listening to their wives, daughters, mothers, granddaughters and nieces.

"Yes, I'm pro-life. I'm also pro-life for the mother, the life she has with her children who are already born. I care about the children who are forced into adulthood, made up by a Legislature full of men so they can feel good about it," Shealy said.

Senators who support the ban said the state needs to show it values all life by taking advantage of the opening created by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Sen. Richard Cash compared abortion to slavery Tuesday, asking if "the human being in the womb is nothing more than the property of a woman?"

"Does an unborn human being have the most fundamental civil right of all which is the right to life?" said Cash, who has made ending abortion his chief focus in five years in the Senate.

Democrats on the Senate Medical Affairs Committee helped set up the showdown by refusing to vote Tuesday as more conservative Republicans removed exceptions for rape and incest from a bill that passed the House last week.

Democrats are not going to help Republicans out of a box of their own making by making "an awful bill a very bad bill," Senate Minority Leader Brad Hutto said.

The same bill without the exceptions appeared to fail in the more conservative state House last week before some Republicans maneuvered through a series of votes to allow abortions for rape and incest victims up to the 12th week of pregnancy.

## Endorsed by Trump, Diehl wins nomination

Associated Press

BOSTON — Geoff Diehl, a former state representative endorsed by former President Donald Trump, won the Republican nomination for Massachusetts governor over businessman Chris Doughty, who was considered the more moderate candidate in the race.

The victory for Diehl sets up a general election contest against Democratic Attorney General Maura Healey, who would be the first openly gay person and the first woman elected governor of Massachusetts if she wins in November.

The state's current governor, Republican Charlie Baker, decided against seeking a third term.

Republican voters made Massachusetts the latest blue state this midterm season to nominate a Trump loyalist in a high-profile race, potentially dooming the party's chances of winning in November.

Voters in Connecticut and Maryland, liberal states where centrist Republicans have found some success in previous elections, also selected far-right candidates to go up against a Democrat in the general election.

"We're going to run a campaign that is focused specifically on 'We the people' — our freedoms, our rights and our prosperity," Diehl told supporters Tuesday evening. "Massachusetts is no longer the place where people flock to in order for the protection of their freedoms and to build a better life for the families. Now it's a place people are leaving."

Healey, whose only rival for the nomination dropped out of the race but remained on the ballot, will be the heavy favorite in November against Diehl in one of the most liberal states in the nation.

## Bannon expects to face criminal charge

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Steve Bannon, a longtime ally of former President Donald Trump, said Tuesday that he expects to be charged soon in a state criminal case in New York City.

Bannon, 68, plans to turn himself in on Thursday, according to a person familiar with the matter. The person insisted on anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation.

The Washington Post, citing anonymous sources, reported that the state criminal case would resemble an earlier attempted federal prosecution, in which Bannon was accused of duping donors who gave money to fund a wall on the U.S. southern border. That federal case ended abruptly, before trial, when Trump pardoned Bannon.

The Manhattan district attorney's office declined comment late Tuesday.

In a statement, Bannon said District Attorney Alvin Bragg "has now decided to pursue phony charges against me 60 days before the midterm election," accusing the Democratic prosecutor of targeting him because he and his radio show are popular among Trump's Republican supporters.

"The SDNY did the exact same thing in August 2020 to try to take me out of the election," Bannon said, referring to his arrest months before Trump's re-election loss.

Federal agents pulled Bannon from a luxury yacht off the Connecticut coast and arrested him on charges he pocketed more than \$1 million in wall donations.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Luxury cars destroyed by fire after crash**

**NC** FOUR OAKS — A portion of Interstate 95 in North Carolina was shut down for several hours after a blown tire caused a truck hauling luxury vehicles to crash.

The driver told WRAL-TV that he was hauling privately-owned, expensive motor vehicles from New York City to Miami. His fully-enclosed truck contained a Porsche, Ferrari, a BMW M8, Lincoln Navigator, Audi S4 and Jeep Rubicon.

The owner-operator of the truck said he had just checked all of his tires at a fuel stop in southern Virginia, but heard what sounded like an explosion behind him before the fire erupted.

He said he tried to extinguish the flames, but eventually had to flee from the scene when the fire became too large.

All of the vehicles were destroyed by the fire.

Firefighters who responded to the scene said that tires and batteries were blowing up like fireworks when they arrived.

**Official: Wolf recaptured after escaping zoo habitat**

**OH** CLEVELAND — A wolf briefly escaped its habitat at an Ohio zoo but was recaptured, and no guests or employees were hurt, authorities said.

Officials at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo said the Mexican gray wolf “briefly breached its habitat” at the zoo but was secured by staff.

Jacqueline Gerling, director of communications at Cleveland Metroparks, said the inci-

dent is under investigation. She said officials are still gathering details on how the animal was able to escape.

**Boat hits marker, crash injures 11 people**

**FL** BOCA CHITA KEY — Four people suffered critical injuries when a boat hit a channel marker near Boca Chita Key and capsized, officials said.

Eleven of the 14 people on the boat were injured in the crash, Miami-Dade Fire Rescue said in a news release.

The agency sent more than 10 units to the scene and worked alongside Miami-Dade Police marine patrol units, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to clear the scene.

Officials said 14 people were on the boat. Seven suffered minor injuries, fire rescue officials said.

**Youth curfew to be enforced amid violence**

**MD** UPPER MARLBORO — Officials in a Maryland county near the nation’s capital that has had its deadliest month in decades said they will strictly enforce a curfew aimed at keeping teens off the streets at night.

WTOP-FM reported that Prince George’s County Executive Angela Alsobrooks made the announcement during a Labor Day weekend in which at least four people were killed by gun violence in the county.

County police investigated 24 killings in the month of August alone.

Alsobrooks said strict enfor-

cement of the curfew will last for at least the next 30 days.

The curfew requires teens under 17 to be off the streets between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. Sunday through Thursday, and between 11:59 p.m. and 5 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays.

During a news conference, Alsobrooks pointed to an “eye-popping” 430 arrests of juveniles this year — nearly double the number last year.

**Woman dies in 900-foot fall from mountain peak**

**CO** ASPEN — A Colorado woman died in a 900-foot fall while scaling a dangerous peak in the Rocky Mountains near Aspen, the Pitkin County Sheriff’s office said.

The woman was hiking solo on Capitol Peak when a witness saw her fall into an area known as Pierre Lakes Basin, according to the sheriff’s office.

The witness said a rock handhold the victim had been using gave way.

The woman’s body was recovered by Mountain Rescue Aspen and flown out by helicopter.

Capitol Peak, located in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness, at 14,137-foot high is one of Colorado’s most difficult mountains to climb because of the extreme exposure and loose, crumbling rock, the sheriff’s office said.

**No indictment against doc accused of abuse**

**OR** PORTLAND — A Clackamas County grand jury declined to indict a former suburban Portland doctor on criminal charges of sexual misconduct and abuse of pa-

tients, finding there isn’t enough evidence to prove the claims, the county district attorney’s office announced.

The grand jury heard testimony from 41 witnesses before returning a “not true bill” on the claims against Dr. David Farley, meaning prosecutors could not prove the allegations without a reasonable doubt, the district attorney’s office said in a statement reported by The Oregonian/Oregon Live.

Farley, formerly of West Linn, still faces a civil suit filed by dozens of patients who allege sexual abuse during his work at West Linn Family Health Clinic, Legacy Meridian Park Hospital and Providence Willamette Falls Medical Center, according to court records.

In 2020, the Oregon Medical Board stripped Farley of his state medical license for dishonorable and unprofessional conduct and gross or repeated negligence.

**Young girl dies, 3 hurt in off-road vehicle crash**

**AZ** FOREST LAKES — An 8-year-old girl was killed and three other Phoenix-area girls injured in the crash of an off-road vehicle in northern Arizona, authorities said.

First responders from the Coconino County Sheriff’s office, Forest Lakes Fire Department, U.S. Forest Service and Arizona Game and Fish all rushed to the scene. Authorities said one 8-year-old girl was pronounced dead at the scene while a second 8-year-old girl and two 14-year-old girls were airlifted to a Phoenix hospital.

— From wire reports



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# Miller feels right at home with Bills

*Associated Press*

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — The memories are too fond, and the bonds formed too tight for Von Miller to say anything negative about the Los Angeles Rams even as the Buffalo Bills' new pass rusher prepares to face his former team in the NFL's season opener on Thursday night.

"They came and got me at a time when I really needed that. They refreshed me," Miller said on Sunday, before listing the many friendships he made — from defensive tackle Aaron Donald to equipment director Brendan Burger — in his brief, successful stint with the Rams. "I can never hate L.A."

What's also true about the NFL's active leader in sacks is how much he's warmed to his new surroundings. Miller, after all, readily acknowledged second-guessing his decision to leave behind the bright lights of Hollywood and his second Super Bowl championship for Buffalo right up to the moment the 33-year-old signed a six-year contract in March.

"I still remember it like yesterday, coach McDermott saying, 'It's Buffalo. I know it doesn't have the optics, but you will learn to love this place,'" Miller said, referring to Bills coach Sean McDermott.

"When he said it, I thought it was part of the recruiting pitch," he added. "But being here in western New York ... I just

feel at home. I've fallen in love with the place, and it just gets better and better each and every day."

Perhaps it's the care packages of toilet paper that piled up at his dorm room door at training camp, and sent by Buffalo fans after Miller questioned the quality of the tissue players were issued. Maybe it was the call he recently received from his new neighbor, alerting Miller that his garage door was open.

And it's difficult for Miller to ignore the team's talent-laden roster, featuring a dynamic Josh Allen-led offense and a defense which led the NFL in numerous statistical categories last season to make him a true, ahem, Bill-iever.

"You're watching clips of (defensive tackle) Ed Oliver and seeing the player he is. You see Josh Allen, (receiver Stefon) Diggs and it definitely helps," Miller said in April. "You know, being here for the start of OTAs, it's definitely put me at peace. I'm excited to go. I'm ready to go win a Super Bowl for the Buffalo Bills."

Expectations have been high in Buffalo since 2020, when the Bills won their first AFC East title in 25 years and reached the conference championship before losing to Kansas City. Miller's addition raises the temperature further by muscling up what had been a middling pass rush.

"Von Miller, there's only one in the

league. Like there's only one Aaron Donald in the league that can effectively change the game on a constant basis and something that we haven't had for a long time," Buffalo Hall of Fame defensive end and the NFL's career sacks leader Bruce Smith told The Associated Press in June. "If he stays healthy, he will be the missing piece that we needed to complete this quest for a Super Bowl title."

Miller's presence alone could have made the difference last season when the Bills squandered a three-point lead in the final 13 seconds of an eventual 42-36 loss to the Kansas City Chiefs in the divisional round of the playoffs. Jerry Hughes, whom Miller replaces, was a half-step away from sacking Patrick Mahomes in what could have ended the Chiefs' two-play, 44-yard drive which set up Harrison Butker's 49-yard field goal as time expired.

Miller showed he hadn't lost a step after being traded by Denver to the Rams in November. After getting five sacks in eight regular-season games with L.A., Miller added four more in the playoffs, including two in the Rams' Super Bowl victory over Cincinnati.

"Von is 33, but that boy is 23. He moves better than anybody on the football field," Bills left tackle Dion Dawkins said.

# Waller ready for opener even without extension

*Associated Press*

HENDERSON, Nev. — Las Vegas Raiders tight end Darren Waller is ready for the start of the season — contract extension, or not.

Waller spoke to the media Tuesday, the first time since announcing last week he was switching agents, from Klutch Sports to Drew Rosenhaus and Robert Bailey.

When asked to confirm if he'll be on the field for Sunday's opener at the Los Angeles Chargers, Waller kept it simple and replied with his trademark grin: "Yeah."

"It's great to be here, it's a blessing to have a game coming up," Waller said. "I don't think there's nothing else I can be more excited about than this (game)."

Waller, whose average annual salary ranks 17th among tight ends in the NFL, according to the website Over The Cap, has two years remaining on the contract he signed during the 2019 season.

Through a text message to The Associated Press on Tuesday morning, Rosenhaus replied, "Working hard on this right now. Doing our best to get something done."

Waller, who is owed just less than \$14 million in those years with no guaranteed money, ranks second in the NFL among all tight ends with 252 catches for 3,006 yards since becoming a starter in 2019, trailing only Kansas City's Travis Kelce in both categories. He is also tied for fifth with 14 TD receptions the past three seasons.

And while he said a new deal that reflects his production would be nice, his focus has been on rejoining his teammates after his significant absence during training camp after practicing just one time since July 30 due to an undisclosed injury. He returned to the field last week.

"It's tough man because I did want to be out there, but I was a little banged up," he

said. "It's a lot to process mentally, but it be like that sometimes, it's a whole bunch of ebbs and flows in this league."

Waller, who turns 30 on Sept. 13, said as a recovering addict and overcoming demons during the early stages of his career has made the negotiation process much easier for him.

"It puts things into perspective 'cause you really focus on what matters the most in life — and to me, it's not necessarily money," Waller said. "To have that contract would be an amazing blessing, but I don't need that contract to be at peace or to enjoy my life. Events like (recovery), going through things like that, really puts things into perspective as far as what really matters."

"Things may not go exactly how you want them to go, but that shouldn't affect commitment that you have to show up somewhere and give your best."

# Garcia tops Gauff for 1st Slam semifinal

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Caroline Garcia knows how it can feel to be a teen in tennis getting a ton of attention and outsized expectations, the way Coco Gauff does now.

One big difference: Garcia, now 28, became an overnight sensation more than a decade ago thanks to one particularly noteworthy performance on a big stage — and long before she achieved the sorts of things Gauff has at 18.

On Tuesday night at the U.S. Open, Garcia took charge and never really let Gauff — or the crowd — get fully involved. From the get-go, Garcia played high-stakes tennis and put strokes where she wanted, sometimes right at Gauff's feet, sometimes well out of reach, and reached the first Grand Slam semifinal of her career with a 6-3, 6-4 victory at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"It kind of got away from me," said the 12th-seeded Gauff, an American who reached the French Open final in June. "It was all her. ... I was striking the ball really clean. You're playing someone, off the bat, they're standing on top of the baseline and

ripping balls. It's not easy."

Garcia, who is from France, hasn't ceded a set at Flushing Meadows so far this year and stretched her winning streak to 13 matches overall, solidifying her status as someone playing as well as anyone in women's tennis at the moment.

"The path is very clear right now," Garcia said. "Which direction I have to go, under stress, under pressure. I'm just trying to follow this path."

Back in 2011, still just 17 and ranked 188th, playing in only her second tour-level event, Garcia led Maria Sharapova — who had won three of her five Grand Slam titles by then — 6-3, 4-1 in the second round at Roland Garros. Sharapova wound up taking the last 11 games to win, but Garcia was suddenly on the map.

Sharapova praised her as someone "on her way way up, definitely," and Andy Murray wrote on Twitter that day: "Girl Sharapova is playing is going to be No. 1 in world one day Caroline Garcia, what a player u heard it here 1st."

Asked recently about that, Garcia laughed

and said she's never talked to Murray about it.

"I was very surprised because, in the end, I still lost the match. But it was a funny moment. ... I was pretty much nobody at the time. I'm not going to complain about it, but I was definitely not ready. More importantly, my game was not ready for it," Garcia said. "I was not able to (play) the same, match after match or week after week. I was trying to manage the pressure that came from it."

She did get to No. 4 in the rankings in 2018, but finished last season ranked 74th. Now she is projected to rise into the top 10 next week and will face Wimbledon runner-up Ons Jabeur of Tunisia on Thursday with a berth in the U.S. Open final at stake.

Jabeur advanced to her first semifinal in New York with a 6-4, 7-6 (4) victory over the player who beat Serena Williams in the third round, Ajla Tomljanovic.

In the men's quarterfinals Tuesday, No. 5 Casper Ruud beat No. 13 Matteo Berrettini in straight sets and will play No. 27 Karen Khachanov, who defeated No. 23 Nick Kyrgios.

# Braves catch struggling Mets, tie for NL East lead

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Matt Olson hit a three-run homer against his former club and the Atlanta Braves won their sixth in a row, outslugging the Oakland Athletics 10-9 on Tuesday night and finally catching the slumping Mets atop the NL East.

The reigning World Series champion Braves (85-51) pulled even with a New York team that had held sole possession of the division lead for 147 days since April 12. The Mets have lost three straight.

Major league wins leader Kyle Wright surrendered a career-high eight runs to the A's, yet Atlanta kept swinging away.

Wright had won four straight starts, boosting his record to 17-5. With the temperature unseasonably warm 86 degrees at game time during California's heat wave, baseballs flew from first pitch.

Wright's career-best score-

less innings streak ended at 15 dating to June 19 against the Astros when he gave up an RBI groundout to Sean Murphy in the first.

**Pirates 8, Mets 2:** Mitch Keller scattered five hits over six shutout innings and host Pittsburgh beat suddenly listless New York.

**Orioles 9, Blue Jays 6:** Adley Rutschman hit a bases-loaded double during a five-run third inning and host Baltimore beat Toronto in a heated game in which both benches briefly emptied in the middle of the seventh.

**Rockies 10, Brewers 7 (10):** Christian Yelich led off the game with a 499-foot homer for Milwaukee, but Randal Grichuk connected twice for host Colorado, including a three-run drive in the 10th inning.

**Rays 8, Red Sox 4:** Randy Arozarena hit a three-run homer in the first inning, Christian Bethancourt and Yu Chang

went deep back-to-back in the sixth and host Tampa Bay beat Boston.

**Dodgers 6, Giants 3:** Joey Gallo blasted a go-ahead, three-run homer in the second inning, Max Muncy added a pair of solo shots and host Los Angeles beat San Francisco.

**Cardinals 4, Nationals 1:** Nolan Gorman broke out of a slump with a homer and two RBIs to help host St. Louis beat Washington.

**Phillies 3, Marlins 2:** Bryce Harper got a gift double in the ninth inning when Miami left fielder Brian Anderson slipped chasing a fly ball, then hustled home on Jean Segura's single to send host Philadelphia to a win.

**Guardians 4, Royals 1:** Shane Bieber pitched eight sharp innings, José Ramírez drove in two runs and AL Central-leading Cleveland won at Kansas City.

**Rangers 4, Astros 3:** Corey Seager scored the go-ahead run

on a wild pitch in the seventh and Texas snapped a nine-game losing streak, winning at AL West-leading Houston.

**Padres 6, Diamondbacks 5:** Jorge Alfaro hit a two-run, bases-loaded single with two outs in the ninth inning to lift host San Diego past Arizona.

**Cubs 9, Reds 3:** Hayden Wesneski allowed two hits over five shutout innings of relief to win his major league debut and host Chicago took advantage of 11 walks to beat Cincinnati for its second win in nine games.

**Angels 5, Tigers 4 (10):** Andrew Velazquez scored on Magneuris Sierra's bunt single in the 10th inning and Los Angeles beat Detroit for its first winning homestand since early May.

**Mariners 3, White Sox 0:** Logan Gilbert tied his career high with nine strikeouts, Cal Raleigh homered and host Seattle beat Chicago to keep the AL wild-card race tight.

# Sue Bird gives basketball a lasting assist

Associated Press

Sue Bird just knows how to win. That's what she does. It's what she has always done. Few in sports can rival the success the point guard has had in women's basketball. Bill Russell and Serena Williams come to mind.

Still, despite decades of success the G-O-A-T narrative is relatively new.

The Greatest Of All Time chatter seemed to pick up traction about the time the 5-foot-8 unselfish floor general stepped out of the shadows and into the spotlight a few years ago.

"Sue to me in some ways is an example, or is an illustration of how the league has grown. She came in when it was just a few years old and there was no social media then and Sue was a much more private person then," Storm owner Ginny Gilder said. "Sue really has found

her voice in the last five or six years, and the league has found its voice."

Bird's career came to an end Tuesday night with the Seattle Storm's 97-92 home loss to Las Vegas in Game 4 of the semifinal series. The 41-year-old Bird had eight points and eight assists.

Bird has been more outspoken off the court on various issues, including social justice, LGBTQ issues and women's rights over the last few years since she started dating her fiancée, soccer great Megan Rapinoe.

"I felt like I was open. Everyone in my life knew. I just hadn't had this conversation with a reporter," Bird told The Associated Press in 2018 about her sexuality "I understand now by saying it publicly you can have an impact. That's what

we're talking about right now."

People have a history of listening to what champions have to say — Russell won 11 NBA titles and Williams has 23 grand slam tennis titles — particularly when they win the right way.

Bird captured two college national titles at UConn, four WNBA championships with the Seattle Storm and five Olympic gold medals with the U.S. That doesn't include the titles she won while playing overseas in the Russian league during WNBA offseasons or the five FIBA World Cup championships she won.

One of the most beloved players in women's basketball, the guard with the nerdy sense of humor doesn't have the public swagger of her friend and fellow basketball superstar Diana Taurasi.

Bird also doesn't have an

MVP trophy, though her value has never been questioned. Her greatness comes from putting teammates in position to do great things. The Storm saw it and they drafted her No. 1 in 2002, and she has spent her entire WNBA career in Seattle.

Bird is part of a rare club; a group of professional basketball players to play 20-plus years with the same organization, including Kobe Bryant and Dirk Nowitzki.

"The bond she has with Seattle, that is a very special thing," said Dan Hughes, who coached Bird for a couple of seasons as well as on the Olympic team in 2021.

"In a major league city that has football, had basketball, has baseball has all those kind of sports, has a university close, there's nothing quite like what she's created.

## Mixed effort in Week 1 for Pac-12 QB transfers

Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — They're all set in the quarterback department at USC and Arizona may have just found the answer. The verdict's still out in Oregon and definitely up in the air at Colorado.

Just a few snap judgments around the Pac-12 over the first week, where the QB play ranged from spectacular to spotty.

A quartet of transfers certainly shined: Caleb Williams for the 10th-ranked Trojans, Jayden de Laura for Arizona, Michael Penix Jr. for Washington and Cameron Ward with Washington State. Not as much for Oregon's Bo Nix, who struggled in a 49-3 loss to defending national champion Georgia — a loss that dropped the Ducks out of the rankings.

It was a tough time for some of the league's incumbents, too, with Utah's Cameron Rising

throwing an interception in the end zone in the closing seconds of a 29-26 loss to Florida. The Utes dropped six spots to No. 13 in the latest poll.

Colorado's Brendon Lewis struggled in a 38-13 loss to TCU, which opened the door for backup J.T. ShROUT, a transfer from Tennessee who didn't play last season after hurting a knee in Colorado's fall camp. Buffaloes coach Karl Dorrell wouldn't reveal how he would divvy up snaps going forward between the two quarterbacks.

"But we do have a plan in place," Dorrell said.

### California dreamin'

Williams followed coach Lincoln Riley to USC from Oklahoma and made an instant impact. He finished 19 of 22 for 249 yards and two touchdowns in a 66-14 victory over Rice. Williams' 86.3% completion rate was the best for a game by a Trojans QB since Matt Bar-

key against Colorado in 2012, according to Pac-12 research.

It was also the most points USC scored in a season opener since erupting for 76 against UCLA in 1929.

Speaking of the Bruins, UCLA veteran QB Dorian Thompson-Robinson threw for 298 yards and two scores in leading his team to a comeback win over Bowling Green. He also ran in another two scores during his 36th career start, which is tied for fourth-most by UCLA QBs. Cade McNown holds the top spot at 44.

Up the road at Stanford, Tanner McKee methodically led the Cardinal to a 41-10 win over Colgate by turning in his second career 300-yard passing game.

"There's another level for him as well," Stanford coach David Shaw said.

### Desert delight

De Laura, who arrived from

Washington State, helped the Wildcats snap an 11-game road skid with a 38-20 win over San Diego State. He became the first Arizona QB to throw four touchdown passes in a game since Khalil Tate in 2018.

For that, he was named the Pac-12 offensive player of the week Tuesday, edging fellow QBs Thompson-Robinson, Williams, Penix and McKee.

### Bo struggles

This wasn't the way Nix and the Ducks wanted to start — falling to Georgia by the largest margin of defeat in a nonconference game since 1985. Nix, a transfer from Auburn, was constantly under pressure against a swarming Bulldogs defense, completing 21 of 37 passes for 173 yards and two interceptions. Nix falls to 0-4 in career contests against Georgia.

"I'm not going to lie to you — it wasn't pretty," Nix said.