

Pressure mounts on Russia amid losses

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin mounted both on the battlefield and in the halls of global power as Ukrainian troops waging a counteroffensive pushed Saturday to advance farther into the country's partly recaptured northeast.

At a high-level summit in Uzbekistan, Putin vowed to press his attack on Ukraine despite recent military setbacks but also had to address concerns over the drawn-out conflict voiced by India and China.

"I know that today's era is not of war," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi told the Russian leader in televised comments as they met Friday in Uzbekistan. "We discussed this with you on the phone several times, that democracy and dialogue touch the entire world."

At the same summit a day earlier, Putin acknowledged China's unspecified "questions and concerns" about the war in Ukraine while thanking Chinese President Xi Jinping for his government's "balanced position" on the conflict.

The hurried retreat of Russian troops this month from parts of a northeast region they occupied early in the war, together with the rare public reservations expressed by key allies, underscored the challenges that Putin faces on all fronts. Both China and India have maintained strong ties with Russia and had sought to remain neutral on Ukraine.

Xi, in a statement, expressed support for Russia's "core interests" but also wanted to work together to "inject stability" into world affairs. Modi said he wanted to discuss "how we can move forward on the path of peace," adding that the biggest concerns facing the world are the problems of food security, fuel security and fertilizers.

"We must find some way out and you too must contribute to that," Modi stressed in a rare public rebuke.

The comments cast a shadow over a summit that Putin had hoped would burnish his diplomatic status and show he was not so internationally isolated.

On the battlefield, Western defense officials and analysts on Saturday said Russian forces were apparently setting up a new defensive line in Ukraine's northeast after Kyiv's troops broke through the previous one and tried to press their advances further into the east.

The British Defense Ministry said in a daily intelligence briefing that the line likely is between the Oskil River and Svatove, some 90 miles southeast of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city.

The new line emerged after the Ukrainian counteroffensive punched a hole through the war's previous front line, allowing Kyiv's soldiers to recapture large swaths of land in the northeastern Kharkiv region that borders Russia.

After the Russian troops retreated from the city of Iziium, Ukrainian authorities discovered a mass grave site, one of the largest so far discovered. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Friday that more than 440 graves have been found at the site but that the number of victims is not yet known.

Zelenskyy said the graves contained the bodies of hundreds of civilian adults and children, as well as soldiers, and some had been tortured. He cited evidence of atrocities, such as a body with a rope around its neck and broken arms.

Ukrainian forces, in the meantime, continue to cross the key Oskil River in the Kharkiv region as they try to press on in a counteroffensive targeting Russian-occupied territory, according to the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War.

The Institute said in its Saturday report that satellite imagery it examined suggest that Ukrainian forces have crossed over to the east bank of the Oskil in Kupiansk, placing artillery there. The river, which flows south from Russia into Ukraine, had been a natural break in the newly emerged front lines since Ukraine launched its push about a week ago.

"Russian forces are likely too weak to prevent further Ukrainian advances along the entire Oskil River if Ukrainian forces choose to resume offensive operations," the institute said.

Pentagon intel chief: Putin can't reach Ukraine goal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Russia's setbacks and stretched resources in Ukraine show its forces are incapable of achieving President Vladimir Putin's initial aims in invading the country as things stand now, the Pentagon's intelligence chief said Friday.

"We're coming to a point right now where I think Putin is going to have to revise what his objectives are for this operation," Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier,

director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, told an intelligence and national security conference outside Washington. "Because 'it's pretty clear right now that he's ... not going to be able to do what he initially intended to do.'"

Putin sent troops into neighboring Ukraine in February with what U.S. officials say was the objective of unseating Ukraine's Western-friendly government. Ukrainian forces drove Russian fighters from

their positions around Ukraine's capital earlier in the war. And Russia suffered another major setback last week, when a Ukrainian counteroffensive forced its troops back from large swaths of Ukraine's northeast.

"The Russians planned for an occupation, not necessarily an invasion, and that has set them back," Berrier said, citing Putin's reluctance so far to fully mobilize Russian forces to get more manpower into the

fight.

President Joe Biden and other administration officials have taken care not to call Russia's latest retreat a Ukrainian victory or turning point in the war, and analysts caution it's impossible to assess what may lie ahead.

"He's coming to a decision point," Berrier said of Putin. "What that decision will be we don't know. But that will largely drive how long this conflict lasts."

W.Va. lawmakers OK abortion ban

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — West Virginia's Legislature passed a sweeping abortion ban with few exceptions Tuesday, approving a bill that several members of the Republican supermajority said they hope will make it impossible for the state's only abortion clinic to continue to offer the procedure.

"It is going to shut down that abortion clinic, of that I feel certain," Republican Sen. Robert Karnes said on the Senate floor, amid shouts from protesters standing outside the chamber doors. "I believe it's going to

save a lot of babies."

Under the legislation, rape and incest victims would be able to obtain abortions at up to eight weeks of pregnancy, but only if they report to law enforcement first. Such victims who are minors would have until 14 weeks to terminate a pregnancy and must report to either law enforcement or a physician.

Rape and incest victims would have to report the assault within 48 hours of getting an abortion, and a patient must present a copy of a police report or notarized letter to a physician before the procedure can be per-

formed. Abortions also would be allowed in cases of medical emergencies.

Lawmakers inserted several provisions they said were specifically targeted at the Women's Health Center of West Virginia, which was the state's first abortion clinic when it opened in 1976 following the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark *Roe v. Wade* case. It has existed as the state's sole abortion clinic for years, making it the ever-increasing target of anti-abortion lawmakers and protesters.

The bill states that surgical abortions can only be performed

at a state-licensed hospital by a physician with hospital privileges. Anybody else who performs an abortion, including nurse practitioners and other medical professionals, could face three to 10 years in prison. A physician who performs an illegal abortion could lose their medical license.

Kaylen Barker, spokesperson for the Women's Health Center of West Virginia, said the clinic will not be shutting down, even if the staff is no longer able to provide abortions. Like many clinics that perform abortions, the facility did not offer the procedure daily.

Biden meets with families of Whelan, Griner

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden met Friday with family members of WNBA star Brittney Griner and another American detained in Russia, Paul Whelan, the first face-to-face encounter that the president has had with the relatives.

In a statement after the meetings, which were held separately, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden

stressed to the families his "continued commitment to working through all available avenues to bring Brittney and Paul home safely."

Still, administration officials have said the meetings were not an indication that negotiations with Russia for their release have reached a breakthrough.

Earlier Friday, John Kirby, a spokesman for the National Security Council, said that Russia

has not responded to what administration officials have called a substantial and serious offer to secure the release of Griner and Whelan.

"The president is not going to let up," Kirby told reporters. "He's confident that this is going to remain in the forefront of his mind and his team's mind, and they're going to continue to work as hard as they can."

Griner has been held in Rus-

sia since February on drug-related charges. She was sentenced last month to nine years in prison after pleading guilty and has appealed the punishment. Whelan is serving a 16-year sentence on espionage-related charges that he and his family say are false. The U.S. government regards both as wrongfully detained, placing their cases with the office of its top hostage negotiator.

DOJ requests appeals court lift Mar-a-Lago probe hold

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department asked a federal appeals court Friday to lift a judge's order that temporarily barred it from reviewing a batch of classified documents seized during an FBI search of former President Donald Trump's Florida home last month.

The department told the 11th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in Atlanta that the judge's hold, imposed last week, had impeded the "government's efforts to protect the nation's security" and interfered with its investigation into the presence of top-secret informa-

tion at Mar-a-Lago. It asked the court to remove that order so work could resume, and to halt a judge's directive forcing the department to provide the seized classified documents to an independent arbiter for his review.

"The government and the public would suffer irreparable harm absent a stay" of the order, department lawyers wrote in their brief to the appeals court.

U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon's appointment of a so-called special master to review the documents, and the resulting legal tussle it has caused, appear certain to slow by

weeks the department's investigation into the holding of classified documents at the Florida property after Trump left office. The Justice Department has been investigating possible violations of multiple statutes, including under the Espionage Act, but it remains unclear whether Trump — who has been laying the groundwork for a potential presidential run — or anyone else might be charged.

The FBI says it took about 11,000 documents, including roughly 100 with classification markings, while serving a court-authorized search warrant at the home on Aug. 8.

Voter challenges are swamping officials

Associated Press

Spurred by conspiracy theories about the 2020 presidential election, activists around the country are using laws that allow people to challenge a voter's right to cast a ballot to contest the registrations of thousands of voters at a time.

In Iowa, Linn County Auditor Joel Miller had handled three voter challenges over the previous 15 years. He received 119 over just two days after Doug Frank, an Ohio educator who is touring the country spreading doubts about the 2020 election, swung through the state.

In Nassau County in northern Florida, two residents challenged the registrations of nearly 2,000 voters just six days before

last month's primary. In Georgia, activists are dropping off boxloads of challenges in the diverse and Democratic-leaning counties comprising the Atlanta metro area, including more than 35,000 in one county late last month.

Election officials say the vast majority of the challenges will be irrelevant because they contest the presence on voting rolls of people who already are in the process of being removed after they moved out of the region. Still, they create potentially hundreds of hours of extra work as the offices scramble to prepare for November's election.

"They at best overburden election officials in the run-up to an election, and at worse they lead to people being removed

from the rolls when they shouldn't be," said Sean Morales-Doyle of The Brennan Center for Justice, which has tracked an upswing in voter challenges.

The voter challenges come as activists who believe in the election lies of former President Donald Trump also have flooded election offices across the country with public records requests and threats of litigation, piling even more work on them as they ready for November.

"It's time-consuming for us, because we have to consult with our county attorneys about what the proper response is going to be," said Rachel Rodriguez, an elections supervisor in Dane County, Wis., which includes Madison, the state capital.

Breaches of voting machines raise midterm worries

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Sensitive voting system passwords posted online. Copies of confidential voting software available for download. Ballot-counting machines inspected by people not supposed to have access.

The list of suspected security breaches at local election offices since the 2020 election keeps growing, with investigations underway in at least three states — Colorado, Georgia and Michigan. The stakes appeared to rise this week when the existence of a federal probe came to light involving a prominent loyalist to former President Donald Trump who has been promoting voting machine conspiracy theories across the country.

While much remains unknown about the investigations, one of the most pressing questions is what it all could mean for security of voting machines with the midterm elections less than two months away.

Election security experts say the breach-

es by themselves have not necessarily increased threats to the November voting. Election officials already assume hostile foreign governments might have the sensitive data, and so they take precautions to protect their voting systems.

The more immediate concern is the possibility that rogue election workers, including those sympathetic to lies about the 2020 presidential election, might use their access to election equipment and the knowledge gained through the breaches to launch an attack from within. That could be intended to gain an advantage for their desired candidate or party, or to introduce system problems that would sow further distrust in the election results.

In some of the suspected security breaches, authorities are investigating whether local officials provided unauthorized access to people who copied software and hard drive data, and in several cases shared it

publicly.

After the Georgia breach, a group of election security experts said the unauthorized copying and sharing of election data from rural Coffee County presented "serious threats" to the November election. They urged the state election board to replace the touchscreen devices used throughout the state and use only hand-marked paper ballots.

Harri Hursti, a leading expert in voting security, said he is concerned about another use of the breached data. Access to the voting equipment data or software can be used to develop a realistic looking video in which someone claims to have manipulated a voting system, he said.

Such a fake video posted online or to social media on or after Election Day could create chaos for an election office and cause voters to challenge the accuracy of the results.

Alaska braces for floods, power outages from storm

Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska — Residents on Alaska's vast and sparsely populated western coast braced Friday for a powerful storm that forecasters said could be one of the worst in recent history, threatening hurricane-force winds and high surf that could knock out power and cause flooding.

The storm is the remnants of what was Typhoon Merbok, which University of Alaska Fairbanks climate specialist Rick Tho-

man said is also influencing weather patterns far from Alaska — a rare late-summer storm now is expected to bring rain this weekend to drought-stricken parts of California.

"All this warm air that's been brought north by this ex-typhoon is basically inducing a chain reaction in the jet stream downstream from Alaska," he said.

"It's a historic-level storm," Thoman said of the system steaming toward Alaska. "In

10 years, people will be referring to the September 2022 storm as a benchmark storm."

Hurricane-force winds were forecast in parts of the Bering Sea, while in the small communities of Elim and Koyuk, around 90 miles from the hub community of Nome, water levels could be up to 18 feet above the normal high tide line, according to the National Weather Service. Flood warnings were in effect until Monday in parts of northwest Alaska.

Va. residents knock data center noise

Associated Press

MANASSAS, Va. — In a universe of cloud computing, northern Virginia might be in a perpetual fog.

More of the data centers that feed the cloud are clustered in the region outside the nation's capital than anywhere else in the world.

As cloud computing — which enables data storage and other services to be delivered over the internet — continues its exponential increase, the appetite for new data centers continues to grow. And increasingly, communities that abut the centers are complaining about their new neighbors, mostly about the noise from constantly whirring fans needed to cool the computers and servers warehoused within.

"It's just a constant whir at a frequency that's obnoxious," said Dale Browne, president of the Great Oak Homeowners Association. Residents there led a protest recently outside a nearby data center in Prince William County, newly built to support Amazon Web Services.

Browne said he preferred the quarry that used to occupy the land over the data center. And he's worried that the noise will only get worse in winter, when a line of trees that provides something of a buffer sheds its leaves.

Speakers at the protest said they fear Prince William County is on the verge of joining its neighbor, Loudoun County, which is known as the data center capital of the world.

"We are the canary in the coalmine," Browne said.

Northern Virginia has been a tech hub since the formation of the internet, and now hosts more data centers than the next five largest U.S. markets combined, according to the Northern Virginia Technology Council.

Collectively, the northern Virginia data centers demand about 1,900 megawatts of power, said Josh Levi, president of the Data Center Coalition, an industry trade group.

Amazon Web Services, for its part, said it's installing acoustical shrouds at the site as part of its noise-reduction efforts.

"Addressing our neighbors' noise concerns in Prince William County is a priority for us," a company spokesman said in a statement.

Reality TV star found guilty in nephew's death

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — A federal jury on Friday convicted a former star of the St. Louis-based reality TV show "Welcome to Sweetie Pie's" of arranging the shooting death of his nephew.

The jury deliberated about 17 hours over three days before reaching its verdict in the murder-for-hire case against James "Tim" Norman, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported. He was charged with conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire, murder-for-hire and conspiracy to com-

mit mail and wire fraud.

Norman and his nephew, Andre Montgomery, both starred in the long-running OWN reality show about a popular soul-food business founded in the St. Louis area by Robbie Montgomery — Norman's mother and Andre's grandmother.

Prosecutors are not seeking the death penalty but Norman could be sentenced to up to life in prison. Sentencing is set for Dec. 15.

Federal prosecutors said Norman, 43, hired two people to kill his 21-year-old nephew March 14,

2016, then tried to cash a \$450,000 life insurance policy taken out on his nephew months earlier.

Defense attorney Michael Leonard said after the verdict that he and Norman were "extremely surprised and disappointed in the outcome" of the case. He said they plan to appeal and that Norman continues to be optimistic that he will eventually prevail.

Leonard said the testimony during the trial of two co-conspirators was shown to be "extremely non-credible."

And he said Norman testified

well during the trial, noting he was not cross-examined.

Leonard argued in his closing argument that the murder plot presented by prosecutors was a "made up theory."

Prosecutors said Norman paid \$10,000 to an exotic dancer, Terica Ellis, to lure his nephew to the site where he was shot and paid \$5,000 to Travell Anthony Hill to shoot Montgomery.

Ellis and Hill both testified for the prosecution in the case. They have both pleaded guilty to participating in the scheme.

More coaches named in SC cheerleader abuse suit

A P/Report for America

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A lawsuit alleging the rampant sexual abuse of underage athletes at a competitive cheerleading gym in South Carolina has been amended to name six more coaches as defendants and three more accusers.

The accusers — now seven female and two male — say in the federal lawsuit amended Thursday that they were sexually abused by coaches at Rockstar Cheerleading and Dance in Greenville, which is in the northwestern corner of the state. The accusers' lawyers allege that sexual abuse at the gym could date back two decades and that there could be 100 more victims

who haven't come forward.

None of the Rockstar coaches have been charged and The Associated Press is not naming them. State and federal law enforcement agencies are investigating the gym and other cheerleading outlets and have seized computers, cellphones and other evidence, one of the accusers' lawyers, James Bannister, said earlier this month. He said the agencies asked lawyers not to identify them.

According to the lawsuit, the abuse ranged from rape and forced oral sex to molestation and pressuring children as young as 13 to send nude photos of themselves to coaches. The lawsuit also details

instances in which coaches gave students alcohol and cannabis at their homes and in hotel rooms during cheerleading competitions.

The allegations first centered on the gym's founder, Scott Foster, who was found dead in his car on Aug. 22. The coroner determined he died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

Kathy Foster, his widow, announced earlier this month that Rockstar Cheerleading and Dance would close "indefinitely."

"Although this was a difficult decision, I believe it is the best option under the circumstances," Foster said in a statement reported by local NBC affiliate WYFF.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Mummified body found in burglarized home

AZ BULLHEAD CITY — Authorities are trying to identify a mummified body found by police in the bathtub of a northwestern Arizona home as they investigated a burglary.

Bullhead City police said officers responding to a burglary in progress discovered 65-year-old Christine Lee Walters rummaging through items inside the house.

Police said officers searched the house and found the body in the tub in a natural mummified state, which occurs when a corpse is exposed to very dry conditions that slow typical decomposition.

Police said Walters told officers she didn't know the body was in the house.

The Mohave County Medical Examiner's Office was trying to determine the cause of death.

High court asked to review dress code ruling

NC LELAND — A North Carolina charter school is petitioning the U.S. Supreme Court to reconsider an appeals court ruling that the school violated female students' constitutional rights by requiring them to wear skirts.

In June, a majority of the full U.S. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals found that the dress code at Charter Day School in Leland violated female students' equal protection rights. The court's majority concluded that since public charter schools receive public funds they're "state actors" and subject to the Constitution's equal protection clause.

In its petition, the school asks the Supreme Court to "review and reverse" the 4th Circuit's decision, arguing that it's a privately run school that receives public funding through its charter, and therefore it's not a government-run entity, The Star-News reported.

School founder Baker Mitchell has said the dress code was intended to create a "code of conduct where women are treated, they're regarded as a fragile vessel that men are supposed to take care of and honor." For now, the dress code has been changed to allow girls to wear pants.

Inmate, jailer shared 949 calls before escape

AL FLORENCE — An Alabama inmate who authorities say escaped with the help of a jail supervisor who later killed herself in Indiana shared nearly 1,000 phone calls with the woman before the breakout, news outlets reported.

Lauderdale County Sheriff Rick Singleton said Casey White and Vicky White, who were not related, may have planned his escape over the phone, but authorities must listen to each of 949 calls before making a determination.

Authorities have said the two were in a romantic relationship and Singleton said at least some of the calls were sexual in nature.

Casey White walked out of the county jail in handcuffs in April accompanied by Vicky White, the assistant corrections director, prompting an 11-day search for the pair. The two were eventually discovered in Evansville,

Ind., where Casey White was captured. Vicky White shot herself in the head moments before the man was arrested, authorities said.

5 hurt in blast during training at prison

PA SKIPPACK TOWNSHIP — An explosive device unexpectedly detonated during a training exercise at a state prison in Pennsylvania, authorities said, leaving five bomb technicians injured.

The training session at SCI Phoenix prison in Skippack Township was being conducted by the FBI's Philadelphia field office and those in attendance included representatives from several state, county and local law enforcement agencies.

The injured bomb technicians included one who serves with the FBI, one from the Pennsylvania state police and three who serve with the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, authorities said. The five were being treated at hospitals for undisclosed injuries that were not considered life-threatening.

The cause of the accident remains under investigation.

VA hospital to get house for vets' families

TN MEMPHIS — Officials at the Veterans Affairs hospital in Memphis say a house where families can stay while relatives are being treated will be built at the facility.

The Memphis Veterans Affairs Health Care System Medical Center is among the sites selected to establish a Fisher House, officials said in a news release.

A Fisher House provides temporary accommodations for families and caregivers of veterans and will serve as a "home away from home" for them while the patient is receiving care at the hospital, the news release said.

The Memphis facility had been approved for a potential 2024-2025 Fisher House opening, but it has been moved up on the schedule, officials said.

Groundbreaking is planned for November or December, with a target opening in fall 2023, officials said.

Reward now \$10K for wild horse killers

NV ELY — The reward has grown to \$10,000 as authorities continue to search for the killer or killers of five wild horses shot last fall in eastern Nevada about 70 miles west of the Utah line.

Four horses, including one with an aborted fetus attached, were found dead within 600 yards of each other on Nov. 16 in Jakes Valley.

A fifth horse was still alive but wounded so severely it had to be euthanized, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management said.

The bureau announced the American Wild Horse Campaign was adding \$5,000 to the \$5,000 reward the agency earlier offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone responsible for the horses' deaths.

"We hope that increasing this reward will help lead to an arrest and conviction for this cruelty," said Holly Gann Bice, director of government relations for the campaign.

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49ers eye rebound; Seahawks look to build

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — The offseason story for the Seattle Seahawks and San Francisco 49ers focused on the change at quarterback.

One week into the season, the transition seems to be going a little bit smoother in Seattle than in San Francisco.

Geno Smith fared well in his first game since the Seahawks traded franchise icon Russell Wilson, besting him in an emotional season-opening win.

Trey Lance didn't fare nearly as well in a surprising opening loss for San Francisco at Chicago, adding a little bit of urgency to this Week 2 meeting between the 49ers (0-1) and Seattle (1-0).

Lance completed 13 of 28 passes for 164 yards and an interception. He added 54 yards rushing on 13 carries.

"I missed a few early," Lance said of his performance in the 19-10 loss to Chicago. "We made too many mistakes early. I missed too many early. I'm going to

turn the page on that."

Smith almost didn't miss early in the Seahawks' 17-16 win over Wilson and the Broncos. He was 17-for-18 for 164 yards and two touchdowns in the first half to stake Seattle to a lead it didn't relinquish.

The second half didn't go quite as well, as Smith finished 23-for-28 for 195 yards, but it was enough for the win.

"He played great," coach Pete Carroll said. "He did exactly like we would hope he would do. We hoped he was going to make every pass and he almost did. He was rolling, a little shaky getting started in the second half, but it wasn't him. It was just stuff that occurred, and we weren't just quite as productive."

New look

The Niners probably won't miss seeing Wilson in a Seahawks uniform. He started 21 games against San Francisco since joining the league in 2012,

winning 17 of them, including one in the 2013 NFC title game. That's tied with Pro Football Hall of Famer Johnny Unitas for the most wins by any quarterback against San Francisco.

"It will be a different game plan," defensive lineman Arik Armstead said. "Russ has his ways to put pressure on the defense. Geno is a great player, too. It will just be a little bit different of a challenge."

Running game

For the second straight season, San Francisco lost its starting running back to a knee injury in the season opener. Elijah Mitchell, who took over the job after Raheem Mostert in 2021, will be out two months after hurting his knee last week.

That gives Jeff Wilson Jr. a chance to be the lead back. Wilson has started nine games at running back over the past four years, averaging 81.2 yards rushing in those games and scoring eight TDs.

"It's time to show everybody what I can do," Wilson said. "I want to show that I belong and I'm a top guy in this league."

Safety plan

Seattle will begin another lengthy stretch without Jamal Adams on the field against the 49ers. Adams suffered a significant injury to his quadriceps tendon in the opener. It's a major blow to Seattle's defensive plans for this season. Adams was expected to be used all over the field, both as a deep safety and as a pass rusher.

Seattle will turn to the combo of Josh Jones and Ryan Neal to fill Adams' role. Jones started 13 games two seasons ago for Jacksonville, and Neal has been used in a variety of roles for Seattle in recent years.

"(Neal) can play in dime, and he can play in the back end. Josh has played safety, as we already know, but he can play the dime spot as well," Seattle defensive coordinator Clint Hurtt said.

Saints' Winston gets another shot at Brady's Bucs

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — New Orleans Saints quarterback Jameis Winston patiently entertained a series of questions about the last time he faced the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in the Superdome.

As he did, it was apparent Winston wasn't too interested in dwelling on the moment his 2021 season ended with a left knee injury on a tackle by Buccaneers linebacker Devin White.

"Hopefully, I don't have to relive that moment again," said Winston, who missed the last nine games of last season while recovering from reconstructive surgery. "I'm just pressing forward and keeping my eyes focused on this week."

The Buccaneers (1-0) are back in New Orleans (1-0) on

Sunday in a game that would give the winner an early lead in the NFC South.

"I'm just grateful I have this opportunity now," Winston said. "I'm here now — healthy — and I'm ready to rock. That's it."

Tampa Bay opened its third season with seven-time Super Bowl winner Tom Brady at quarterback by riding running back Leonard Fournette's 127 yards rushing to a comfortable 19-3 victory over Dallas.

New Orleans, by contrast, needed the largest fourth-quarter comeback in franchise history to prevail at Atlanta, scoring 17 straight points inside the final 12 minutes to win 27-26.

Now Winston gets his second start against the team that drafted him first overall in 2015, but let him go in 2020 when Brady

chose to sign with the Bucs after two decades with New England.

"They're just another team. I've got a lot of respect for a lot of those players, some of my old teammates," Winston said. "But, at the end of the day, it's a division game, going against the best in Tom Brady. But I don't get to go against him. I get to go against Devin White and (linebacker) Lavonte David, and (safety) Antoine Winfield and (defensive tackle) Vita Vea and (edge rusher) Shaq Barrett."

While Brady won a Super Bowl in his first season with Tampa Bay and made the playoffs in his second, Tampa Bay has gone 0-4 in regular-season games against the Saints during that span. Brady has thrown eight interceptions in those losses.

"That's probably the thing

that jumps out the most — turnovers," Brady said. "They are a very physical team. I think they beat us up physically. It's a tough, hard-nosed team. They're very well coached."

First-year coach Dennis Allen was New Orleans' defensive coordinator for the first three of those games and served as interim coach in a 9-0 victory at Tampa Bay last December, when Sean Payton stayed home because of a positive COVID-19 test. Allen still oversees and call plays for the Saints' defense.

Bucs coach Todd Bowles hopes his offense has a better plan for Allen's unit this time.

"Anytime you lose to a team more than once or twice," Bowles said, "you try to put a finger on what they're trying to do and what you're doing — and what you can do differently."

Backup QB lifts FSU past Louisville

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Pressed into duty on the road Friday night due to an injury, Tate Rodemaker lifted Florida State to yet another improbable victory.

This time, the Seminoles didn't need a blocked extra point with no time left to win as they did two weeks ago against LSU. Instead, they relied on their backup quarterback to lead the way in a 35-31 come-from-behind victory over Louisville.

The sophomore came in after Jordan Travis suffered a lower left leg injury with a little more than four minutes left in the second quarter and Florida State down 21-14. All the Valdosta, Ga., native did was lead the Seminoles to three, 75-yard second-half scoring drives. The last came with 7:54 left with a sensational 2-yard catch in the end zone by Johnny Wilson that put the Seminoles (3-0, 1-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) up for good.

Rodemaker, who finished 6-for-10 passing for 109 yards with two touchdowns and an interception, said his mindset upon entering the game was to treat it like his work during the week.

"The first half I just kind of got thrown out there," Rodemaker said. "The second half was, I just went out there and played my game. I just told myself, 'This is like

practice and I'd been doing it all week.' I just transferred it over to the game."

Florida State gained 260 of its 455 yards with Rodemaker taking the snaps. Treshaun Ward added 126 yards rushing on 10 carries for the Seminoles. Wilson finished with seven catches for 149 yards and both touchdowns from Rodemaker.

Florida State coach Mike Norvell said his team "willed" itself to the win, and that was due in large part to Rodemaker's performance.

"That was an example of what this team is built on," Norvell said. "It was a special night. That is one that I will remember forever."

The Cardinals (1-2, 0-2) lost despite racking up 495 yards on offense. Malik Cunningham threw for 243 yards on 21-for-34 passing with a touchdown and an interception. The fifth-year senior also added 127 yards rushing and two scores on 17 carries.

Hindering Louisville's effort were three turnovers, including a second-quarter fumble by Cunningham on a botched handoff at the Seminoles 12 early in the second quarter. The Cardinals, who held four leads in the game, also committed 11 penalties for 81 yards.

The Cardinals had a chance to win the

game after Ryan Fitzgerald missed a 36-yard field goal with 1:44 left, but Kevin Knowles II picked off a Cunningham pass at the Florida State 38 with 37 seconds left.

Wyoming 17, Air Force 14: Titus Swen ran for 102 yards and a late fourth-quarter touchdown to give the host Cowboys a victory over the Falcons in a Mountain West Conference opener on Friday night.

Swen pushed three defenders into the end zone for a 5-yard touchdown that capped an eight-play, 75-yard drive for Wyoming (3-1, 1-0) with 6:06 remaining. The Cowboys then forced a three-and-out before running out the clock.

Air Force (2-1, 0-1), which entered leading the nation averaging 508.5 yards rushing, was held to 171 yards on the ground. John Lee Eldridge III carried 13 times for 104 yards.

Andrew Peasley had 162 yards passing for Wyoming. He tossed a 19-yard touchdown pass to Treyton Welch, who made a two-handed, over-the-shoulder catch while falling across the goal line in the second quarter.

Haaziq Daniels threw a pair of touchdown passes for the Falcons. Daniels lofted a pass from near the midfield logo to Cade Harris in the end zone that gave Air Force a 14-10 lead with about 10 minutes left.

Gragson wins his third consecutive Xfinity race

Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Noah Gragson held off Brandon Jones over the closing laps Friday night at Bristol Motor Speedway to win his third consecutive Xfinity Series race.

Gragson won his series-high sixth race of the season driving a Chevrolet for JR Motorsports. He was aided when teammate Justin Allgaier was flagged for speeding during the final pit stops under caution; Gragson did not pit and restarted the race in the lead.

Gragson and his JRM crew climbed the Bristol fence in celebration, then a breathless Gragson sat on the wall to collect himself.

PayPal may pull sponsorship

PHOENIX — PayPal said it will no longer sponsor the Phoenix Suns if owner Robert Sarver remains part of the franchise when his suspension ends.

And the National Basketball Players Association later made its stance clear, with executive director Tamika Tremaglio telling ESPN that NBA players want Sarver banned for life.

PayPal said its current partnership deal with the Suns ends after the coming season, meaning it will expire during Sarver's one-year suspension from the NBA. Sarver was suspended this week, plus fined \$10 million, after an investigation showed a pattern of lewd, misogynistic and racist speech and conduct during his 18 years as owner of the Suns.

In other NBA news:

■ Point guard Dennis Schröder is returning for a second stint with the Los Angeles Lakers. Schröder's agency, Priority Sports, announced the deal on social media. Schröder confirmed it with an Instagram post. The German guard spent the 2020-21 season with the Lakers, averaging 15.4

points and 5.8 assists. He played for Boston and Houston last season.

Herbert fractured ribs

Los Angeles Chargers quarterback Justin Herbert fractured rib cartilage after taking a hit during the fourth quarter Thursday night in a 27-24 loss at Kansas City.

Coach Brandon Staley said a morning CT scan confirmed the injury.

Homa, Willett lead Fortinet

NAPA, Calif. — Max Homa moved into position to defend his title at the Fortinet Championship, shooting a 5-under 67 to share the 36-hole lead with Danny Willett in the PGA Tour's season opener.

In other golf news:

■ Dustin Johnson shot a 9-under 63 at Rich Harvest Farms to take a three-shot lead after the first of three rounds in the LIV Golf Invitational-Chicago.

Brewers get walk-off win over Yanks

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Garrett Mitchell is delivering a flair for the dramatic early in his major league career.

Mitchell hit a two-out RBI single in the ninth inning and the Milwaukee Brewers rallied from a five-run deficit to beat Aaron Judge and the New York Yankees 7-6 on Friday night.

Mitchell is batting just .182 since making his debut in late August, but he frequently has delivered in clutch situations such as this one.

“Those types of moments are things you’ve been working for your whole entire life as a kid,” Mitchell said. “I’m just thankful to be in that moment and have that opportunity to help the team.”

Judge went 2-for-4 and scored two runs but didn’t homer, keeping his season total at 57. He’s four off the American League record set by the Yankees’ Roger Maris in 1961, and his .311 average is eight points back of Minnesota’s Luis Arraez as Judge chases a Triple Crown.

Judge beat out an infield hit in the first, reached on a check-swing single to center in the second and was intentionally walked for the 17th time this season in the third.

Astros 5, Athletics 0: Yordan Alvarez homered in his first three at-bats, Justin Ver-

lander threw five hitless innings in his return from the injured list and host Houston clinched a postseason berth.

The Astros (95-50) won their sixth straight game to join the Los Angeles Dodgers as the first two teams to secure playoff spots, reaching their sixth straight postseason.

Mets 4, Pirates 3: Taijuan Walker won back-to-back starts for the first time in two months, Daniel Vogelbach homered against his former team and host New York beat Pittsburgh.

Guardians 4, Twins 3: Pinch-runner Ernie Clement raced home from second base on a wild pitch in the eighth inning for the go-ahead run and AL-Central leading Cleveland rallied past visiting Minnesota in the opener of a crucial five-game series.

Rangers 4, Rays 3: Nathaniel Lowe hit his 25th home run in a four-run inning and Texas won at Tampa Bay.

Red Sox 2, Royals 1: J.D. Martinez had an RBI single in the eighth inning and host Boston rallied late to beat Kansas City.

Nationals 5, Marlins 4: Joey Meneses hit an inside-the-park home run, Ildemaro Vargas had a go-ahead double in the eighth inning and host Washington rallied to beat Miami.

Angels 8, Mariners 7: Mike Trout homered for the eighth time in 10 games, and

host Los Angeles ended a four-game losing streak.

Cubs 2, Rockies 1: Marcus Stroman won at Wrigley Field for the first time since signing with host Chicago, pitching no-hit ball into the sixth inning.

Tigers 3, White Sox 2 (10): Victor Reyes hit a deep fly ball to center field in the 10th inning, scoring automatic runner Ryan Kreidler from third base and giving host Detroit the win.

Cardinals 6, Reds 5: Albert Pujols hit his 698th home run, a tying two-run drive in the sixth inning that sparked host St. Louis past Cincinnati.

Blue Jays 6, Orioles 3: Matt Chapman hit two home runs, George Springer added a three-run shot and host Toronto maintained its position in the AL wild-card race.

Dodgers 5, Giants 0: Dustin May pitched five no-hit innings and outdueled Logan Webb to lead Los Angeles to a win at San Francisco.

Braves 7, Phillies 2: Ronald Acuña Jr. hit a go-ahead, two-run homer in a six-run eighth inning and host Atlanta rallied for the win.

Padres 12, Diamondbacks 3: Brandon Drury hit a pair of homers, Blake Snell threw a season-high seven innings and San Diego cruised to a win at Arizona.

Stearns, Mets’ 4-time All-Star catcher, dies at 71

Associated Press

DENVER — John Stearns, a four-time All-Star catcher with the New York Mets, has died after a long battle with cancer. He was 71.

Stearns, who played football and baseball at the University of Colorado, died Thursday night in Denver, according to the Mets.

He passed away less than three weeks after attending an Old Timers’ Day at Citi Field in New York that coincided with the Mets’ 60th anniversary. He was noticeably thin in his Mets jersey on Aug. 27 and waved to the crowd when he was introduced on the field.

“No one played the game with more spirit or determination than John Stearns,” Mets President Sandy Alderson said Friday in a statement. “He literally willed himself to attend Old Timers’ Day last month so he could visit friends and old teammates. Despite his illness, he even managed to step into the batting cage to take a few swings.

His nickname, ‘Bad Dude’ couldn’t have been more appropriate.”

Stearns was a complete catcher. He could hit, run and throw out baserunners, nailing almost 38% of those who attempted to steal.

Stearns was a late draft pick as a defensive back by the NFL’s Buffalo Bills in 1973. The Philadelphia Phillies took him second overall that same year and he opted to play baseball.

With Bob Boone behind the plate for the Phillies, Stearns never really had a chance to play in Philadelphia after struggling early with his hitting. After appearing in one game for the Phillies in 1974, he was traded to the Mets as part of the multi-player deal that sent relief pitcher Tug McGraw to Philadelphia.

Stearns played with the Mets from 1975-84 in a tenure that included frequent battles with injuries. He was named an All-Star in 1977, ’79, ’80 and ’82. He had a career bat-

ting average of .260 in 810 games with 152 doubles, 10 triples and 46 home runs. He also stole 91 bases, including a team-high 25 in 1978.

A former safety and punter in college, Stearns was solid and feisty. Pirates star Dave Parker sustained a broken collarbone in one collision with Stearns in 1978 and future Mets star catcher Gary Carter got into a fight with him after another collision at home in ’79.

One other incident Mets fans will remember is Stearns tackling one of two fans who ran on the field in 1980 and eluded authorities a little too long for his liking.

After retiring as a player, he served in a number of baseball jobs as a scout with Milwaukee, a bullpen coach for the Yankees, a minor league manager for Toronto and as a scout and coach for the Orioles.

He returned to the Mets as a coach in 2000 for two years under Bobby Valentine and later as a scout and minor league coach.