

## 'Fat Leonard' captured in Venezuela

*Associated Press*

SAN DIEGO — A Malaysian defense contractor nicknamed "Fat Leonard" who orchestrated one of the largest bribery scandals in U.S. military history has been arrested in Venezuela after fleeing before his sentencing, authorities said Wednesday.

The international manhunt for Leonard Glenn Francis ended with his arrest by Venezuelan authorities Tuesday morning at the Caracas airport as he was about to board an airplane for another country, the U.S. Marshals Service said.

Interpol Venezuela Director General Carlos Garate Rondon said in a statement posted on Instagram that Francis came to Venezuela from Mexico.

Rondon said he was headed to Russia. The arrest came on the eve of his scheduled sentencing in a federal court in California for a bribery scheme that lasted more than a decade and involved dozens of U.S. Navy officers.

There was no immediate word on when he might be extradited to the United States.

Francis was under home arrest in San Diego when he cut off his GPS ankle bracelet and escaped on Sept. 4. Ten U.S. agencies searched for Francis and authorities issued a \$40,000 reward for his arrest.

U.S. authorities also issued a red notice, which asks law enforcement worldwide to provisionally arrest someone with the possibility of extradition. Malaysia and Singapore both have extradition agreements

with the United States.

Francis pleaded guilty in 2015 to offering prostitution services, luxury hotels, cigars, gourmet meals and more than \$500,000 in bribes to Navy officials and others to help his Singapore-based ship servicing company, Glenn Defense Marine Asia Ltd. or GDMA. Prosecutors said the company overcharged the Navy by at least \$35 million for servicing ships, many of which were routed to ports he controlled in the Pacific.

Francis had been allowed to remain in home confinement to receive medical care while he cooperated with the prosecution. With his help, prosecutors secured convictions of 33 of 34 defendants, including more than two dozen Navy officers.

## Ukraine announces prisoner exchange with Russia

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine announced a high-profile prisoner swap early Thursday that was the culmination of months of efforts to free many of the Ukrainian fighters who defended a steel plant in Mariupol during a long Russian siege. In exchange, Ukraine gave up a prominent ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin and 55 other prisoners.

The exchange followed the release Wednesday of two U.S. military veterans who disappeared three months ago while fighting Russia with Ukrainian forces. They were among 10 prisoners, including five British nationals, released by Russian-backed separatists as part of a prisoner exchange mediated by Saudi Arabia, officials said Wednesday.

Alex Druke, 40, and Andy Huynh, 27, went missing in the Kharkiv region of northeastern Ukraine near the Russian border June 9. They had traveled to Ukraine on their own and became friends because both are from Alabama.

On Thursday, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his government had won freedom from Russian custody for 215 Ukrainian and foreign citizens, with the help of Turkish and Saudi mediation ef-

forts. He said many were soldiers and officers who had faced the death penalty in Russian-occupied territory.

Russian officials didn't immediately confirm or otherwise comment on what appeared to be the biggest prisoner swap during the nearly seven-month war.

Of the total, 200 Ukrainians were exchanged for just one man — pro-Russian opposition leader Viktor Medvedchuk, who is Ukrainian. The 68-year-old oligarch escaped from house arrest in Ukraine several days before Russia's invasion Feb. 24 but was recaptured in April. He faced up to life in prison on charges of treason and aiding and abetting a terrorist organization for mediating coal purchases for the separatist, Russia-backed Donetsk republic in eastern Ukraine.

Medvedchuk came to know Putin while serving as chief of staff for former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma. The Russian leader is the godfather of Medvedchuk's daughter. His detention sparked a heated exchange between officials in Moscow and Kyiv.

Medvedchuk is the head of the political council of Ukraine's pro-Russian Opposition Platform-For Life party, the largest opposition group in Ukraine's parliament.

The Ukrainian government has suspended the party's activity; Putin has repeatedly spoken about Medvedchuk as a victim of political repression.

"It is not a pity to give up Medvedchuk for real warriors," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video speech. "He has passed all the investigative actions provided by law. Ukraine has received from him everything necessary to establish the truth in the framework of criminal proceedings."

In another swap, Ukraine gained the release of five commanders who led Ukraine's defense of the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol in exchange for 55 Russian prisoners it was holding, Zelenskyy said.

More than 2,000 defenders, many in the Azov Regiment, marched out of the Azovstal steel plant's twisted wreckage into Russian captivity in mid-May, ending a nearly three-month siege of the port city of Mariupol.

Zelenskyy said the five leaders, including Azov Regiment commanders Denys Prokopenko and Svyatoslav Palamar, are in Turkey, where they will remain as part of the deal "in complete safety" until the end of the war, under the protection of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

# Yokosuka base remembers fallen sailors in ceremony

BY ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Dozens of white flowers were carefully placed at a memorial service here Thursday as guests recalled the sailors who lost their lives this year and in destroyer collisions in 2017.

Around 50 sailors and civilians, including three Gold Star families, gathered inside an auditorium on Command Hill at Yokosuka to take part in the memorial, part of the Navy Gold Star Program's Bells Across America for Fallen Service Members.

Following a prayer and remarks from base commander Capt. Les Sobol, sailors in dress whites read out the names of more than 180 sailors who died this year across the Navy.

At the end of the ceremony, the sailors and other guests were encouraged to place flowers in front of a list of the names and bow, mirroring a Japanese funerary prac-

tice called "kenko."

"I think in our day in and day out, it's easy to get lost in what's urgent versus what's important," Yokosuka's chaplain, Cmdr. David Kim, told Stars and Stripes after the ceremony. "It's times like this where we can pause and remember and just remind each other as a community that we're here for each other."

This year marks the seventh annual Bells Across America memorial worldwide, but just the second commemoration at Yokosuka, which started the practice last year.

The ceremony also remembered the 17 sailors who died aboard the USS Fitzgerald and the USS John S. McCain in 2017.

In June of that year, the Fitzgerald collided in Japanese waters with a Philippine-flagged container vessel, killing seven sailors. Just two months later, 10 sailors died aboard the McCain after the ship collided with a Liberian-flagged tanker near Singapore.

# Prosecutors: Arson suspect hated life aboard amphibious assault ship

*The San Diego Union-Tribune*

SAN DIEGO — A 19-year-old San Diego sailor was so unhappy with his life as a deck seaman after failing to become a Navy SEAL that, in the summer of 2020, he snuck into a vehicle storage area on the amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard and ignited a spark, according to Navy prosecutors.

That spark turned into a blaze that, over the next four days, burned and destroyed the \$1.2 billion warship, they said.

That's the story Navy Cmdr. Leah O'Brien told a judge during opening statements in the court-martial of Seaman Recruit Ryan Mays that kicked off this week.

Over the past two days, prosecutors have begun to lay the foundation of their case for arson — a charge that could send the sailor to prison for life if found guilty.

Mays, now 21, is charged with aggravated arson and the willful hazarding of a vessel. He denies the charges and officially entered a plea of not guilty Monday morning at the start of the proceedings at Naval Base San Diego.

The sailor waived his right to a trial by military jury.

O'Brien said Mays found himself working essentially as a janitor on the Bonhomme Richard, a duty far beneath what the sailor envisioned for himself when he enlisted to become a SEAL.

Mays quit the Navy's Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL school in Coronado on his second day. When sailors fail to complete BUD/S they are sent to the fleet Navy as "undesignated" sailors.

"(It) was not the glory he envisioned," O'Brien said of Mays' job on the warship.

The trial is scheduled through Sept. 29.

# Military to hire 2K to aid sexual assault victims

BY ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Defense Department and service branches are hiring 2,000 civilians to serve as training experts and special-victim advocates, replacing the previous standard of assigning service members to do the job, military leaders told lawmakers on Wednesday.

Reaction from members of the House Armed Services Committee subpanel on military personnel were split to this change, which is one of 82 recommendations the military is implementing after an independent review of its handling of sexual assault and harassment within the ranks.

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., chairwoman of the subpanel, praised the move to hire professionals from outside the military.

But Rep. Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin, the ranking Republican on the subcommittee, said it was troubling to hire people without "a coherent plan for a new prevention program."

The hearing Wednesday focused on whether progress has been made by military leaders to implement the recommendations of the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military, which submitted its report in July 2021 to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Gilbert Cisneros told the committee that defense officials hope to hire the 2,000 civilians by the end of fiscal 2027.

"We've assigned people tasks as a collateral duty in order to do this," he said. "Our goal is to professionalize that workforce. It's going to be a civilian workforce. The prevention workforce is going to do the training, and it's not just on sexual assault and sexual harassment. They're going to cover child abuse. They're going to cover suicide prevention. They'll cover other subjects as well."

Defense officials said earlier this month that they were speeding up the hiring efforts of the 2,000 personnel after an annual report on the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment in the military showed a 13% increase in 2021.

# More apply for unemployment aid last week

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans filing for jobless benefits rose slightly last week with the Federal Reserve pushing hard to cool the economy and tamp down inflation.

Applications for unemployment benefits for the week ending Sept. 17 rose by 5,000 to 213,000, the Labor Department reported Thursday.

Last week's number was revised down by 5,000 to 208,000, the lowest figure since May. First-time applications generally reflect layoffs. The four-week average for claims, which evens out some of the weekly volatility, fell by 6,000 to 216,750.

On Wednesday, the Federal Reserve raised its benchmark short-term borrowing rate by another three-quarters of a point in an effort to bring down persistent, decades-high inflation.

Though gas prices have steadily re-

treated since summer, prices for food and other essentials remain elevated enough that the Fed has indicated it will keep raising its benchmark interest rate until prices come back down to normal levels.

Fed officials have pointed to the remarkably resilient U.S. labor market as added justification for raising rates five times this year, including three 75-basis point hikes in a row.

For now, businesses remain desperate to find workers, posting more than 11 million job openings in July, meaning there are almost two job vacancies for every unemployed American.

Earlier this month, the Labor Department reported that employers added still-strong 315,000 jobs in August, though less than the average 487,000 a month over the past year.

The unemployment rate ticked up to 3.7%, largely because hundreds of thou-

sands of people returned to the job market. Some didn't find work right away, so the government's count of unemployed people rose.

The U.S. economy has been a mixed bag this year, with economic growth declining in the first half of 2022.

Investors and economists worry that the Fed's aggressive rate hikes could force companies to cut jobs and tip the economy into a recession.

Online real estate companies RedFin and Compass recently announced job cuts as rising interest rates have cooled the housing market. The National Association of Realtors reported Wednesday that sales of existing homes fell again in August, the seventh straight monthly decline.

Other high-profile layoffs announced in recent months include The Gap, Tesla, Netflix, Carvana and Coinbase.

## Indiana abortion ban blocked week after taking effect

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — An Indiana judge on Thursday blocked the state's abortion ban from being enforced, putting the new law on hold as abortion clinic operators argue that it violates the state constitution.

Owen County Judge Kelsey Hanlon issued a preliminary injunction against the ban that took effect one week ago. The injunction was sought by abortion clinic operators who argued in a lawsuit that the state constitution protects access to the medical procedure.

The ban was approved by the state's Re-

publican-dominated Legislature on Aug. 5 and signed by GOP Gov. Eric Holcomb. That made Indiana the first state to enact tighter abortion restrictions since the U.S. Supreme Court eliminated federal abortion protections by overturning Roe v. Wade.

The judge wrote "there is reasonable likelihood that this significant restriction of personal autonomy offends the liberty guarantees of the Indiana Constitution" and that the clinics will prevail in the lawsuit. The order prevents the state from enforcing the ban pending a trial on the mer-

its of the lawsuit.

The ban, which includes limited exceptions, replaced Indiana laws that generally prohibited abortions after the 20th week of pregnancy and tightly restricted them after the 13th week.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana, which is representing the abortion clinics, filed the lawsuit Aug. 31 and argued the ban would "prohibit the overwhelming majority of abortions in Indiana and, as such, will have a devastating and irreparable impact on the plaintiffs and, more importantly, their patients and clients."

## Powell warns inflation fight may cause US recession

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve delivered its bluntest reckoning Wednesday of what it will take to finally tame painfully high inflation: Slower growth, higher unemployment and potentially a recession.

Speaking at a news conference, Chair Jerome Powell acknowledged what many economists have been saying for months: That the Fed's goal of engineering a "soft landing" — in which it would manage to slow growth enough to curb inflation but not so much as to cause a recession — looks increasingly unlikely.

"The chances of a soft landing," Powell said, "are likely to diminish" as the Fed steadily raises borrowing costs to slow the worst streak of inflation in four decades. "No one knows whether this process will lead to a recession or, if so, how significant that recession would be."

Before the Fed's policymakers would consider halting their rate hikes, he said, they would have to see continued slow growth, a "modest" increase in unemployment and "clear evidence" that inflation is moving back down to their 2% target.

"We have got to get inflation behind us,"

Powell said. "I wish there were a painless way to do that. There isn't."

Powell's remarks followed another substantial three-quarters of a point rate hike — its third straight — by the Fed's policy-making committee. Its latest action brought the Fed's key short-term rate, which affects many consumer and business loans, to a range of 3% to 3.25%. That's its highest level since early 2008.

Falling gas prices have slightly lowered headline inflation, which was a still-painful 8.3% in August compared with a year earlier.



# Puerto Rico tries to reach areas cut off by Fiona

*Associated Press*

CAGUAS, Puerto Rico — Hurricane Fiona left hundreds of people stranded across Puerto Rico after smashing roads and bridges, with authorities still struggling to reach them four days after the storm smacked the U.S. territory, causing historic flooding.

Government officials have been working with religious groups, nonprofits and others braving landslides, thick mud and broken asphalt by foot to provide food, water and medicine for people in need, but they are under pressure to clear a path so vehicles can enter isolated areas soon.

Nino Correa, commissioner for Puerto Rico's emergency management agency, estimated that at least six municipalities across the island had areas that were cut off by Fiona, which struck as a Category 1 hurricane

and was up to Category 4 power Thursday as it headed toward Bermuda.

Manuel Veguilla said he has been unable to leave his neighborhood in the north mountain town of Caguas since Fiona swept in on Sunday.

"We are all isolated," he said, adding that he worries about elderly neighbors, including his older brother who does not have the strength for the long walk it takes to reach the closest community.

Veguilla heard that municipal officials might open a pathway Thursday, but he doubted that would happen because large rocks covered a nearby bridge and the 10-foot space beneath it.

Neighbors have shared food and water dropped off by nonprofit groups, and the son of an elderly woman was able to bring back basic supplies by

foot Wednesday, he said.

Veguilla said that in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, a Category 4 storm that struck five years ago and resulted in nearly 3,000 deaths, he and others used picks and shovels to clear the debris. But Fiona was different, unleashing huge landslides.

"I cannot throw those rocks over my shoulder," he said.

Like hundreds of thousands of other Puerto Ricans after Fiona, Veguilla had no water or electricity service, but said there is a natural water source nearby.

Fiona sparked an islandwide blackout when it hit Puerto Rico's southwest region, which already was still trying to recover from a series of strong earthquakes in recent years. Some 62% of 1.47 million customers remained without power Thursday, four days after the storm, amid an extreme heat alert is-

sued by the National Weather Service.

Some 36% of customers, or nearly half a million, did not have water service.

The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency has sent hundreds of additional personnel to help local officials as the federal government approved a major disaster declaration and announced a public health emergency on the island.

Neither local nor federal government officials had provided any overall damage estimates from the storm, which dropped up to 30 inches of rain in some areas. More than 470 people and 48 pets remained in shelters.

"Our hearts go out to the people of Puerto Rico who have endured so much suffering over the last couple of years," said Brad Kieserman, vice president of operations and logistics at the Red Cross.

## Court lifts hold on Trump's Mar-a-Lago records in probe

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — In a stark repudiation of Donald Trump's legal arguments, a federal appeals court on Wednesday permitted the Justice Department to resume its use of classified records seized from the former president's Florida estate as part of its ongoing criminal investigation.

The ruling from a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit amounts to an overwhelming victory for the Justice Department, clearing the way for investigators to continue scrutinizing the documents as they consider whether to bring criminal charges over the storage of top-secret records at Mar-a-Lago after Trump left the White House.

In lifting a hold on a core aspect of the department's

probe, the court removed an obstacle that could have delayed the investigation by weeks.

The appeals court also pointedly noted that Trump had presented no evidence that he had declassified the sensitive records, as he maintained as recently as Wednesday, and rejected the possibility that Trump could have an "individual interest in or need for" the roughly 100 documents with classification markings that were seized by the FBI in its Aug. 8 search of the Palm Beach property.

The government had argued that its investigation had been impeded by an order from U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon that temporarily barred investigators from continuing to use the documents in its inquiry.

## Ohio GOP House candidate misrepresents military service

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Campaigning for a northwestern Ohio congressional seat, Republican J.R. Majewski presents himself as an Air Force combat veteran who deployed to Afghanistan after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, once describing "tough" conditions including a lack of running water that forced him to go more than 40 days without a shower.

Military documents obtained by The Associated Press through a public records request tell a different story.

They indicate Majewski never deployed to Afghanistan but instead completed a six-month stint helping load planes at an air base in Qatar, a longtime U.S. ally that is a safe distance from fighting.

Majewski's account of his time in the military is just one

aspect of his biography that can be labeled as suspect.

His post-military career has been defined by exaggerations, conspiracy theories, talk of violent action against the U.S. government and occasional financial duress.

"It bothers me when people trade on their military service to get elected to office when what they are doing is misleading the people they want to vote for them," Don Christensen, a retired colonel and former chief prosecutor for the Air Force, said of Majewski. "Veterans have done so much for this country and when you claim to have done what your brothers and sisters in arms actually did to build up your reputation, it is a disservice."

Majewski's campaign declined to make him available for an interview.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Man sentenced in illegal autopsies case**

**KS** TOPEKA — A Kansas man who admitted running an illegal autopsy scheme was sentenced to nearly six years in prison for wire fraud.

Shawn Parcels, 42, who lived in Topeka and Leawood, was sentenced in federal court to one count of wire fraud, the U.S. Attorney's office said. He pleaded guilty in May. As part of the plea deal, nine other fraud counts were dropped.

Parcels, a self-taught pathology assistant with no formal education, as owner of National Autopsy Services persuaded a client to pay \$5,000 for an autopsy, according to court records. The client received an emailed autopsy report that appeared to be authored by Parcels. No pathologist was involved in the examination or report, which is illegal.

**Worker dead in store bathroom for 4 days**

**SC** COLUMBIA — A 63-year-old worker died in the public bathroom of a South Carolina department store, but her body was not discovered for four days, authorities said.

Bessie Durham, a janitor at the Belk at Columbiana Centre, was found dead in a bathroom stall, Columbia police said. Her cleaning cart was outside the restroom.

Durham's body was found after her family filed a missing person report, Columbia Deputy Police Chief Melron Kelly, told WIS-TV.

The Lexington County Coroner's Office said there are no signs someone killed Durham or

that she was using drugs.

**Hunter faces charges for mistaken shooting**

**VT** HUNTINGTON — A Vermont hunter is facing charges for allegedly shooting and critically injuring another hunter earlier this month that he said he mistook for a bear, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department said.

The 35-year-old victim from Fairfax was hit in the abdomen by a single gunshot as he was walking to a tree stand on private land in Huntington on Sept. 10, according to the department. A third hunter called 911. The victim was taken to the University of Vermont Medical Center in Burlington, where he remained in stable condition, the department said.

A 25-year-old hunter from Bolton is facing felony charges of aggravated assault and negligent use of a gun, as well as a misdemeanor charge of reckless endangerment, the department said.

**Woman in police dog attack to get \$600K**

**CA** SAN DIEGO — San Diego officials were expected to approve a \$600,000 payout to a woman who was severely injured when a police dog attacked her in her own yard after escaping from its trainer's home.

A lawsuit filed by Jenna Cole in March called the bite a "vicious" and "unprovoked attack" and accused the city of negligence for how it trained, monitored and caged the K-9.

City officials described the bite as "unintentional" and said the dog escaped his handler's

backyard through a gate with a broken latch while the officer was cleaning its city-issued kennel in Jan. 2021.

The dog initially tried to attack Cole's 5-year-old daughter, but the child was protected by the netting of a trampoline, according to court documents obtained by the San Diego Union-Tribune.

**Suspect caught in sewers is hospitalized**

**IN** BLOOMINGTON — A man who was believed to be armed with a rifle was apprehended in sewers beneath the city of Bloomington, Indiana University police said.

The suspect was safely removed from a storm drain beneath Kirkwood Avenue and was taken to a hospital to be evaluated, police said.

It was not clear whether the man was actually was armed. The Herald-Times reported that police said the man was wanted on warrants.

**State cracks down on company after river spill**

**MI** FLINT — State regulators ordered a Flint chemical company to truck wastewater to a water treatment plant, weeks after it was blamed for an oily discharge in the Flint River.

The 11-page order describes disputes between Lockhart Chemical and the Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy. The state said the company has a "long-running history" of failing to comply with environmental laws.

"This company was given multiple opportunities to fix the problems at their facility and

they refused. Now they must face the consequences," Attorney General Dana Nessel said.

**Archaeological sites featured on website**

**KY** FRANKFORT — A new website highlights how archaeological sites across Kentucky have contributed knowledge about the state's history, officials said.

Discover Kentucky Archaeology was launched by the Kentucky Heritage Council/State Historic Preservation Office in partnership with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, a statement from the Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet said. It includes information on more than 100 prehistoric and historic archaeological sites across 64 counties.

The site was launched in September, which is celebrated as Kentucky Archaeology Month.

**Bus carrying 8 students crashes into store**

**SC** NORTH CHARLESTON — A school bus crashed into a store in South Carolina, hitting one student outside and sending the driver and four students on board to the hospital, authorities said.

The front of the school bus was inside the brick building up to its windshield and the rear emergency door of the bus was open in TV footage from the scene.

The bus was carrying eight elementary students to North Charleston Creative Arts Elementary School when it slammed into the Neighbor Store, North Charleston Assistant Fire Chief Christian Rainey told reporters.

- From wire reports



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# Georgia may be better despite losses to draft

Associated Press

ATHENS, Ga. — College football coaches are notorious for hyping up their opponents with preposterous accolades.

Still, it was a bit jarring to hear Kent State's Sean Lewis sizing up the reigning national champion Georgia Bulldogs.

"I don't think it's an exaggeration," Lewis said Monday, "to say this is the greatest collection of talent ever assembled on a football team."

OK, maybe it was just the desperate ramblings of a coach looking to plant the seeds of complacency in the top-ranked Bulldogs before they tear into his overmatched team on Saturday.

After all, Georgia lost a record 15 players in the last NFL Draft — five of them first-rounders from one of the great defenses of the last quarter-century.

But three games into a new season, Lewis' assessment doesn't seem that out of line.

Seriously, could this Georgia team be even better than the last one? You know, the one that celebrated in Indianapolis some eight months ago after claiming the school's first national title in 41 years?

"I think so," said Bulldogs defensive back Christopher Smith, sounding more matter-of-fact than boastful, "but that just comes with our standard. Our standard is our motivation. We hear a lot of things that people say, but we never fade into that. We just continue to work."

The Bulldogs have rampaged through their first three opponents while barely breaking a sweat in the southern humidity.

They blew out then-No. 11 Oregon 49-3 in the season opener. They coasted past FCS opponent Samford 33-0. And this past weekend at South Carolina, they demolished their Southeastern Conference rival 48-7 in a performance that was so dominating, many of the home fans went streaming for the exits by halftime.

The only touchdown allowed so far by the Bulldogs came in the waning seconds against the Gamecocks, a meaningless score that came long after the starters had been pulled.

Still, it seemed to tick off the Georgia defenders, who have set a very high standard for themselves.

"It definitely bothered me," Smith said. "We never want to

give up any points whenever we step out on the field, and we were so close to keeping a goose egg on the board. But things didn't work out, so back to the drawing board. That gives us something else to fix."

While the defense has kept up its dominating ways — even with all those former Dawgs now playing in the NFL — the offense has clearly stepped up its game from a year ago. Stetson Bennett, the former walk-on quarterback who has worked his way into the early Heisman conversation, directs an offense with a seemingly unlimited supply of weapons at his disposal.

Eleven players had at least one catch against the Gamecocks, all of it adding up to 339 yards and 16.1 yards per reception.

Ten players ran the ball, with no one gaining more than Bennett's 36 yards on three carries, but the cumulative effort produced 208 yards and a 5.9 average.

"When things are working, you roll with it," coach Kirby Smart said. "Getting the players out on the perimeter to do their things whether it's receivers, tight ends or running backs. I

think we have done a good job of dispersing the ball and letting everybody get a piece of the action."

Last year's Georgia team had an offense that played it close to the vest, knowing it could win most games simply by being efficient and not making any major mistakes.

Not so with this group, which is willing to attack from anywhere on the gridiron.

Bennett has been on the field for 21 possessions, which have produced 14 touchdowns, four field goals, a missed field goal and just two measly punts.

Smart refused to get drawn into any speculation about whether this team could actually be better than his 2021 squad.

"I don't do comparisons," he said. "You can't compare anybody to last year, because last year's team, 15 of them are in the NFL."

But the way things are going, the biggest challenge facing the Bulldogs might be overconfidence.

"This team has a long way to go," Smart said. "The worst thing that can happen to this team is to start believing what people say about them."

# Buckeyes test gives Mertz chance to show progress

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Wisconsin has a new offensive coordinator and a mostly new group of receivers this season.

It turns out the Badgers might also have a new version of quarterback Graham Mertz.

Mertz has increased his efficiency and decreased his mistakes in his third season as a starter after throwing more interceptions than touchdown passes last year. Mertz is ranked fifth among all Bowl Subdivision quarterbacks in passer rating after finishing 92nd in that category a year ago.

"I think (I've been) solid," Mertz said. "That doesn't mean anything unless we build on it. That's what I'm excited for."

That brings him to arguably the biggest test of his career Saturday when Wisconsin

(2-1) opens its Big Ten schedule at No. 3 Ohio State (3-0). The Badgers have lost their last eight meetings with the Buckeyes and are a 17½-point underdog this time, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

Mertz will likely need to have the best game of his career for Wisconsin to have any chance. His teammates and coaches like what they've seen from him so far.

"He's trusting in himself," Badgers coach Paul Chryst said. "He's trusting what he's seeing. He's trusting those around him."

Measuring Mertz's progress remains difficult because of the way Wisconsin's season has gone.

It has two lopsided victories over Championship Subdivision program Illinois State and winless New Mexico State, one of the

nation's worst FBS teams. Mertz played well against Washington State, but the Badgers still lost 17-14 despite being favored by about 17 points.

The Ohio State game will provide a better indication of how far Mertz has come.

Even so, it's hard to ignore Mertz's improved numbers.

Mertz has completed 71% of his passes with six touchdowns and two interceptions. Last year, Mertz completed 56.8% of his passes with six interceptions and one touchdown through the first three games of the season.

"The only (stat) that really matters is the winning percentage," Mertz said. "If you're winning, you're playing good football. That kind of goes hand in hand. For me, that's all I'm really focused on."



# Kim a fresh face among Presidents Cup golfers

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Tom Kim can be excused for his mistake Wednesday. The Presidents Cup is new for the 20-year-old South Korean, just like it is for seven other players on the International team that face a daunting task at Quail Hollow.

Only this was more a math mistake than a rookie mistake.

“We’re on 12 today, and he makes a mistake doing simple math there,” said Camilo Villegas of Colombia, one of the assistant captains for the International team. “So I look at the kid and said, ‘Tom, is that college math?’ He looks at me and goes, ‘Dude, I didn’t even graduate from high school.’”

Kim ticks about every box when it comes to the fresh faces at this Presidents Cup, which starts Thursday, but looks are deceiving.

At age 20, he is the youngest player to play for the International team since Ryo Ishikawa, of Japan, and he was 18 in 2009

at Harding Park. Kim has also won more tournaments this year than anyone on his team. And he brings as much personality as he does game.

He likes to laugh and talk trash. The team has players from seven countries who speak four languages. That’s not a problem, as Kim speaks three languages.

Captain Trevor Immelman was asked earlier in the week who would be his starting five if they were playing basketball. He had Kim penciled in as his point guard because of his size and his “fast mouth.”

Kim’s given name is Joohyung. As a boy, he was so smitten with Thomas the Tank Engine that he wanted that for his name, and eventually it was shortened to Tom.

Born in South Korea, his family moved to Australia when he was a child. He picked up golf at age 6 and when the cost of living became too high, his parents decided to move to the Philip-

ines. Kim’s golf thrived even more.

As for the high school math? As he said in a first-person account for Golf Digest, “College scouts weren’t coming after me, and my goal was always to turn pro, so I decided to do it early.” He was 15.

Kim worked his way through developmental tours in Asia. His path was slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and he spent the last two years on the Korean tour, winning twice.

He ended last year at No. 131 in the world, and then quickly made himself known. He won the Singapore International to start the year (and was runner-up in the Singapore Open a week later). He received a sponsor exemption to the Scottish Open — Korea-based Genesis is the title sponsor — and finished third.

That sent him on his way toward a PGA Tour card and he nailed that a few weeks later by winning the Wyndham Cham-

ionship, where he started the tournament with a quadruple-bogey 8.

There is very little dull about Thomas the Tank.

Kim was invited to the Saudi International in February and shared a table at the press conference with LIV Golf CEO Greg Norman to talk about Saudi money going to the Asian Tour. But the kid left little doubt where he always wanted to play.

He was overjoyed at getting his PGA Tour card, and he’s even more amped up about the Presidents Cup, a chance to hand the mighty American team its first loss since 1998, before Kim was even born.

“I’ve dreamt of this as a kid. For me to be able to represent the international team is an absolute honor. So I’m super pumped,” he said. “I can’t wait for Thursday to come. I’ve always dreamt of doing crazy fist bumps because it’s match play. So I’m really looking forward to it.”

# US tops Belgium in basketball World Cup opener

Associated Press

SYDNEY — It’s been a whirlwind week for Alyssa Thomas.

She went from losing in the WNBA Finals on Sunday to flying 10,000 miles to Australia a day later to play for the United States in the World Cup. Thomas had 14 points, nine assists and seven rebounds in her debut for the Americans, who beat Belgium 87-72 in the tournament opener on Thursday.

After finding out she’d be on the U.S. roster, she never gave any thought to skipping the World Cup.

“Excited to be a part of this, been waiting a long time,” the 30-year-old Thomas said.

U.S. coach Cheryl Reeve was impressed with what Thomas was able to do with the short turnaround time.

“It’s what I expected Alyssa to do, as it’s just what she does. She’s a competitor and knows how to (play),” Reeve said. “WNBA players don’t get enough credit for how well that they transition from overseas

play to WNBA play to national team play.”

Breanna Stewart scored 22 points and Jewell Loyd also scored 14 for the short-handed U.S. team, which was still missing Las Vegas Aces players A’ja Wilson, Chelsea Gray and Kelsey Plum. They were on their way to Australia after celebrating the franchise’s first WNBA championship with a parade on Tuesday. The trio is expected to be in Sydney on Friday.

Thomas and her Connecticut Sun teammate Brianna Jones, who also arrived on Wednesday, were two of six players on the roster who hadn’t played for the U.S. in either the World Cup or Olympics.

This team is very different from the one that won a third straight gold in Spain in 2018. Sue Bird is retired and Diana Taurasi is out as well. Brittney Griner, who would have been on this team, is in a Russian jail after being convicted of drug possession last month in a politically charged case and sentenced to nine years in prison. The U.S. government is trying to secure her release.

These teams met in the semifinals of the

2018 World Cup, with the Americans using a big third quarter to pull away and win by 16.

The Americans jumped out to a quick 12-0 lead before Belgium settled down to get within one. The U.S. lengthened the lead again behind Stewart and Loyd and was up 48-39 at the half. The Americans went on a 12-4 run to start the third quarter and put the game away.

The U.S. did a stellar job defensively on Belgian Emma Meesseman. The Chicago Sky star led the Olympics in scoring last year, averaging 26.8 points. She had four against the U.S., which has now won 23 consecutive World Cup games since losing in the 2006 semifinals to Russia. The Americans are three wins short of matching their record 26-game run from 1998-2006.

Julie Vanloo scored 13 points to lead Belgium.

“Really proud of this young team,” Meesseman said. “Sometimes we lacked focus but a lot to be proud of and looking forward to the next few games.”

# Judge stays at 60 as Yanks win big

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Aaron Judge disappointed fans by staying stuck at 60 homers but doubled twice and scored on Oswaldo Cabrera's first-inning grand slam that started the New York Yankees to a 14-2 rout of the Pittsburgh Pirates on Wednesday night.

Judge doubled on the first pitch to him in the first and fifth innings. Given another time up during an eight-run eighth inning, Judge walked on four pitches from rookie Eric Stout as the sellout crowd of 46,175 booed loudly.

Cabrera and Gleyber Torres had five RBIs each. Torres homered twice in the eighth inning, raising his season total to 23.

Luis Severino (6-3) returned from a strained right lat muscle that had sidelined him since July 13 and allowed one run and two hits in five innings with six strikeouts.

Pirates rookie Roansy Contreras (5-5) struck out a career-high 10, allowing six runs and six hits in 4⅓ innings.

**Padres 1, Cardinals 0:** Blake

Snell (8-9) held St. Louis hitless until Albert Pujols beat the shift for a single with two outs in the seventh inning and host San Diego beat NL Central-leading St. Louis.

The Padres have shut out the Cardinals in the first two games of the three-game series, keeping Pujols at 698 career homers. San Diego stayed 1½ games ahead of Philadelphia for the NL's second wild-card spot.

**Brewers 6, Mets 0:** Pinch-hitter Mike Brosseau greeted Drew Smith with a grand slam in the pitcher's return from two months on the injured list and host Milwaukee beat NL East-leading New York.

The Mets maintained a one-game division lead over Atlanta.

**Guardians 8, White Sox 2:** Rookie Steven Kwan homered among his three hits and Triston McKenzie struck out 13 as host Cleveland moved closer to its first AL Central title since 2018.

The Guardians have won seven of eight.

**Nationals 3, Braves 2:** Joey Meneses hit a go-ahead, two-

run homer off Jesse Chavez (0-2) in the seventh inning, and visiting Washington stopped Atlanta's five-game winning streak.

**Phillies 4, Blue Jays 3 (10):** Matt Vierling had five hits, including the game-winning RBI single in the 10th inning, to rally host Philadelphia past Toronto.

J.T. Realmuto homered for Philadelphia, which snapped a five-game losing streak to stay 2½ games ahead of Milwaukee for the final NL wild-card spot.

**Diamondbacks 6, Dodgers 1:** Madison Bumgarner (7-15) tossed six innings of one-hit ball, giving the former World Series MVP his first win in nearly two months, and visiting Arizona beat Los Angeles.

**Orioles 8, Tigers 1:** Jordan Lyles (11-11) threw the second complete game of his career, Kyle Stowers homered and drove in three runs, and host Baltimore avoided its first-ever season sweep by Detroit.

**Astros 5, Rays 2:** Kyle Tucker hit a tiebreaking two-run homer in the eighth inning, Lance McCullers Jr. (4-1) pitched seven effective innings

and AL West champion Houston completed a three-game sweep of Tampa Bay.

**Athletics 2, Mariners 1:** Luis Torrens homered for one of four hits by visiting Seattle, which was shut down again by last-place Oakland.

**Giants 6, Rockies 1:** Logan Webb (14-9) didn't allow a hit until one out in the sixth inning and was then immediately pulled by manager Gabe Kapler after 66 pitches in visiting San Francisco's win over Colorado.

**Reds 5, Red Sox 1:** Jonathan India and Kyle Farmer each drove in two runs, Donovan Solano added a solo homer and Cincinnati beat Boston at home for the first time since June 13, 2008.

**Royals 5, Twins 2:** MJ Melendez homered for the second straight day and host Kansas City beat fast-fading Minnesota.

**Rangers 7, Angels 2:** Rookie Josh Smith homered over the fence for the first time and host Texas beat Los Angeles.

**Cubs 4, Marlins 3:** Ian Happ hit a go-ahead sacrifice fly in the eighth inning and visiting Chicago rallied to beat Miami.

## Longtime Kansas City executive Moore fired

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Dayton Moore had walked into the somber interview room on the first floor of Kauffman Stadium so many times over the years, presiding over news conferences to announce high-profile trades, discuss free-agent acquisitions, celebrate two American League pennants and a long-sought World Series championship.

This was different, though. This was to announce his firing as a front-office executive of the Kansas City Royals.

Yet it spoke volumes about the character of Moore, who grew up in Wichita and rooted for the Royals during their glory years in the 1970s and '80s, that he would show up at the ballpark at all. He wanted to see the players one more time, and the folks in the organization — some of whom he'd worked alongside for 16 years — and bid them all farewell.

"I'm very proud of what we accomplished here," Moore said during brief remarks, "and I'm really excited about the future."

Even if he won't be involved in it.

"I have so many people to thank, and I will have that opportunity," Moore said, "and I look forward to thanking each and every one of you, and the many people in this organization and around baseball. And I will do that personally. I will take the time to do that. That's important, because that's what makes this game strong. What makes the game strong is believing in one another. And that's what we've always tried to do."

There weren't very many believers when Moore first walked into Kauffman Stadium in 2006, taking over a moribund club with poor infrastructure, worse finances and no direction. Heading out to the ballpark meant an afternoon sitting in the sun, killing time on a lazy

summer day, and knowing full well that the Royals were probably going to lose.

Moore had a vision, though. He began to invest in Latin America, establishing academies in the Dominican Republic before every club in the majors was doing it. He built out the scouting department, knowing that the financially strapped Royals would need to win with their own draft picks. And he instilled a professional culture that remains today.

It took nearly a decade before the fruits of his labor were realized.

The Royals won the American League pennant in 2014 with a stunning run as a wild-card team, where they ultimately lost to the San Francisco Giants with the tying run left stranded on third base in Game 7 of the World Series. And they repeated as league champs in 2015, when they finished the job by beating the New York Mets in five games for the title.