

Marine Reaper drone pilots eye Iranians

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

Marines are increasingly using Reaper drones to patrol Middle East waterways as part of a strategy to stop Iran's seizures and harassment of tankers moving through some of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

Drone pilots who spoke with Stars and Stripes said they've been patrolling the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow passage near Iran that U.S. agencies have deemed "the world's most important oil transit chokepoint."

The MQ-9 Reapers can carry up to eight laser-guided missiles, but those on patrol are unarmed, Marine Corps officials said.

Parker, an enlisted MQ-9 sensor operator, said a typical mission gives him a set of parameters for a ship to look for, with details such as its size and speed.

The Reaper's powerful sensor scans vast swaths of ocean, said Parker, who, along with his colleagues, spoke with Stars

and Stripes on the condition that their full names not be revealed because of security concerns.

The data they get back maps the water "and any surface vessels that may be of interest to us," Parker said.

The U.S. accuses Iran of smuggling arms on ships to militant proxy groups, as well as drugs to help fund those groups. The Navy and the Coast Guard have joined with international partners to seize those vessels, which are often relatively simple watercraft attempting to evade authorities.

Iran has retaliated, the U.S. says, by seizing lawfully operated commercial ships. Tehran has seized or harassed about 20 such vessels, including the Marshall Islands-flagged oil tanker Advantage Sweet in late April and the Panama-flagged Niovi in May.

That prompted the U.S. Navy to announce an increase in patrols by ships and aircraft in the Persian Gulf.

Reconnaissance missions carried out by Marine drone crews have been a crucial component of those patrols, U.S. Central Command chief Gen. Michael "Erik" Kurilla said in a recent emailed statement.

"The team's extended on-station times provide much-needed overlap between other maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft," Kurilla said. "This makes life much more difficult for our adversaries even in a complex environment, which is exactly what you expect of U.S. Marines."

While specific numbers are classified for operational security reasons, a Marine Reaper squadron would have six to 10 drones at full strength, said James, a Marine MQ-9 pilot.

The service said in August that it was deploying two additional drones to the region, which James confirmed are now in use.

The Marines have a goal of operating more MQ-9 Reapers as part of Force Design 2030,

which seeks to ready the Corps for potential conflict with larger adversaries like China or Russia.

The experience of flying the Reapers in the Middle East will be useful elsewhere, James said.

"Our pilots are learning how to fly the MQ-9 in international airspace that is often very tight, with little room for error," James said.

In 2021, the Marines acquired their first two Reapers, which they had previously leased. The service created a new job specialty for Reaper pilots in 2020.

Compared with previous aerial drones used by the Marines, Reapers are larger, fly longer distances and can carry more sensors, said Dan Gettinger, a drone expert and the director of communications at the Virginia-based Vertical Flight Society.

The longer range could prove useful over the vast distances of the Pacific Ocean if a war breaks out there, he said.

North Korean leader Kim vows full support for Russia

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea's Kim Jong Un vowed "full and unconditional support" for Russia's Vladimir Putin on Wednesday as the two leaders isolated by the West held a summit that the U.S. warns could lead to a deal to supply ammunition for Moscow's war in Ukraine.

The meeting, which lasted over four hours at Russia's spa resort in the Far East, underscores how their interests are aligning: Putin is believed to be seeking one of the few things impoverished North Korea has in abundance — stockpiles of aging

ammunition and rockets for Soviet-era weapons.

Such a request would mark a reversal of roles from the 1950-53 Korean War, when Moscow gave weapons to support Pyongyang's invasion of South Korea, and in the decades of Soviet sponsorship of the North that followed.

The decision to meet at the Vostochny Cosmodrome, Russia's most important launch center on its own soil, suggests Kim is seeking Russian help in developing military reconnaissance satellites, which he has described as crucial to enhance the threat of his nuclear-capable

missiles. In recent months, North Korea has repeatedly failed to put its first military spy satellite into orbit.

Putin met Kim's limousine, brought from Pyongyang in the North Korean leader's special armored train, at the entrance to the launch facility, greeting his guest with a handshake that lasted about 40 seconds.

In opening remarks, Putin talked about the Soviet Union's wartime support for North Korea and said the talks would cover economic cooperation, humanitarian issues and the "situation in the region."

Kim, in turn, pledged continued support for Moscow, making an apparent reference to the war in Ukraine.

"Russia is currently engaged in a just fight against hegemonic forces to defend its sovereign rights, security and interests," he said. "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has always expressed its full and unconditional support for all measures taken by the Russian government and I take this opportunity to reaffirm that we will always stand with Russia on the anti-imperialist front and the front of independence."

Ukraine attacks shipyard in annexed Crimea

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine—A Ukrainian attack on a strategic shipyard early Wednesday in Russian-annexed Crimea wounded 24 people, damaged two ships undergoing repairs and caused a fire at the facility, Russian authorities reported.

The attack in the port city of Sevastopol, which serves as the main base for Russia's Black Sea Fleet, took place as Moscow attacks killed at least three civilians and injured 14 across Ukraine, the president's office said.

A pre-dawn drone onslaught in southern Ukraine's Odesa region damaged port and civilian infrastructure in the region's Izmail district — not far from the Crimean city — and wounded seven people, Gov. Oleh Kiper said.

Russian attacks on residential

areas in 10 cities and villages in the Donetsk region killed three people and wounded three. Fighting in the Zaporizhzhia region injured one resident in Orikhiv, while shelling in southern Kherson damaged homes and a kindergarten, the government said.

The skirmishes occurred as Russian President Vladimir Putin hosted North Korean leader Kim Jong Un during a summit that the U.S. has warned could lead to a deal to supply arms to Moscow's troops in Ukraine.

The Crimean Peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014, has been a frequent target since Putin ordered a full-scale invasion of Ukraine more than 18 months ago. Last month, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed to do all he could to bring back Crimea

and has urged international allies to support the effort.

On Monday, Ukraine claimed it had recaptured gas and oil drilling platforms in the Black Sea that Russia seized in 2015. Russia had used the platforms for electronic warfare equipment and to launch helicopters, and Ukraine said getting control of them would help it regain Crimea.

Wednesday's attack on the Sevastopol Shipyard appeared to be one of the biggest in recent weeks. Russia's Defense Ministry said Ukraine launched 10 cruise missiles at the shipyard and three sea drones at Russian ships in the Black Sea. The shipyard is of strategic importance to Russia because vessels in its Black Sea fleet are repaired there.

Seven missiles were shot down, and all the sea drones were de-

stroyed, the Russian military said, but some of the missiles damaged two ships that were being repaired at the shipyard.

Mikhail Razvozhayev, the Moscow-appointed governor of Sevastopol, said on Telegram that the resulting fire injured 24 people. He posted a photo showing the shipyard in flames with smoke billowing over it.

Ukraine's RBC-Ukraine news outlet reported, citing unnamed sources in Ukrainian military intelligence, that an amphibious landing ship and a submarine were damaged in the attack. Some Russian messaging app channels made the same claim.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the Russian warships damaged at the Sevastopol shipyard would be fully repaired and return to naval service.

Okinawa protests US Navy visit to an isolated island

**BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND MARI HIGA**

Stars and Stripes

CAMPFOSTER, Okinawa—A U.S. Navy ship for the first time in over a decade stopped at a southwestern Japanese island close to Taiwan, over objections from Okinawa prefecture, to demonstrate U.S. commitment to security in the Pacific.

The USS Pioneer, an Avenger-class mine countermeasures ship, and its crew of about 60 arrived Thursday at Ishigaki Island and stayed one night, a spokeswoman from Okinawa prefecture's Military Base Affairs Division said by phone Wednesday.

The prefecture protested to Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the U.S. Consulate General Naha and the U.S. military when it learned in August of the planned visit, the spokeswoman said. Some government officials in Ja-

pan are required to speak to the media on condition of anonymity.

"It is extremely regrettable" that the ship stopped at Ishigaki after being asked not to, the spokeswoman said. The prefecture asked that the Navy only use the port in an emergency, she said.

The Pioneer's crew took part in community relations events and met with local municipal and business leaders, according to a news release Friday from Mine Countermeasures Squadron 7.

Camp Ishigaki, a Japan Ground Self-Defense Force base, opened March 16 with anti-ship and surface-to-air missiles, Japanese public broadcaster NHK reported. The island is one of three where Japan plans to install an upgraded version of its Type-12 surface-to-ship missile by 2026 to counter perceived threats from China and North Korea.

Chinese aircraft swarm Taiwan zone for 4th day

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

A surge of Chinese military activity in the Taiwan Strait continued Wednesday as dozens of aircraft crossed the waterway's median line, according to Taiwan's National Defense Ministry.

Taiwan monitored 35 aircraft — including fighter jets, military transports, unmanned aerial vehicles and surveillance aircraft — on Wednesday, 28 of which entered the island's southwestern air defense identification zone, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

The ministry tasked its own fighter jets, warships and missile defense systems with responding, the ministry said on X.

The waves of aircraft marked the fourth day of China's sudden increase in military activity

around Taiwan. Sunday and Monday, 39 Chinese aircraft and 13 ships were active around the island, according to earlier posts by the ministry. Taiwan's ships and defense systems tracked another 22 aircraft and 20 vessels on Tuesday.

China's heightened activity is probably its response to the U.S. guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson and the Canadian frigate HMCS Ottawa transiting the strait together on Saturday, said Norah Huang, director for international relations at the Prospect Foundation, a security and foreign affairs think tank in Taipei, on Tuesday.

The Pentagon is monitoring the situation and urged Beijing to "cease its military, diplomatic, economic and legal pressure against Taiwan," spokesman John Supple told Stars and Stripes.

Gas price increase pushed up inflation; other prices cooling

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A spike in gas prices pushed up inflation in August, yet most other costs rose at a more modest pace, evidence that consumer price increases overall are still cooling.

In a set of conflicting data on Wednesday, the Labor Department said the consumer price index rose 3.7% in August from a year ago, up from a 3.2% annual pace in July.

Yet excluding the volatile food and energy categories, so-called core prices rose 4.3%, down from 4.7% in July and the smallest increase in nearly two years. That remains far from the Federal Reserve's 2% target.

Despite the seemingly divergent figures, the decline in the core measure could add to optimism that inflation is coming under control. The Federal Reserve closely tracks core prices because they are seen as a better indicator of future inflation trends.

Wednesday's figures also make it more likely the Fed will skip an interest rate hike at its meeting next week.

While more expensive gas could elevate inflation this month as well, most economists forecast that inflation will slowly decline through the end of the year.

On a monthly basis, consumer prices jumped 0.6% in August, the biggest increase in more than a year. Gas prices spiked nearly 11% in August, though they have since leveled off. According to AAA, the average nationwide price at the pump was \$3.84 on Tuesday, little changed from a month ago.

Excluding food and energy, core prices increased just 0.3%

in August from July.

Economists forecast that air fares likely also rose in August from July.

But they expect used cars, which soared in price during the pandemic and its aftermath, will fall as much as 3% in August from July, and new cars could also decline or at least stay unchanged. Apartment rental costs are expected to keep rising at about a 0.4% monthly pace, but that is half the rate of a year ago and could fall further later this year.

Grocery prices are increasing more slowly after skyrocketing in the wake of supply disruptions brought on by Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year. The increase has strained many households' budgets. Even with more modest increases each month, grocery costs are still 3.6% higher than a year ago.

Federal Reserve officials are becoming more open to the idea that inflation is coming under control, though chair Jerome Powell said last month it was still "too high."

But in his high-profile speech at Jackson Hole, Wyo., Powell said that the Fed would proceed "carefully" with any further rate hikes, which many economists saw as an opening for the Fed to skip a rate increase at its Sept. 19-20 meeting.

The Fed has lifted its benchmark interest rate 11 times in the past 12 meetings to about 5.4%, the highest level in 22 years.

Lorie Logan, president of the Federal Reserve's Dallas branch, said last week that "another skip could be appropriate" at its next meeting, "but skipping does not imply stopping."

New England endures more rain after hourslong storm

Associated Press

LEOMINSTER, Mass. — More heavy rain was falling Wednesday in New England, where residents kept one eye on cleanup and another on the path of Hurricane Lee after downpours dropped nearly 10 inches of rain in six hours and flooded parts of Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

The rainfall was a "200-year event," said Matthew Belk, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Boston. Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey issued a state of emergency Tuesday night following the "catastrophic flash flooding and property damage" in two counties and other communities.

The rain created sinkholes in Leominster, Mass. Cars sank into the ground at an auto dealership. The front yard collapsed at one house, resulting in a 15-foot hole that exposed the foundation.

Andre Obin said his parents, who have lived in the home for

many years, were able to pull out of their driveway shortly before the cave-in.

"We're just so lucky that the pavement didn't give out underneath the vehicle," he told WCVB-TV.

Parts of Connecticut and Massachusetts were under a flash flood warning Wednesday morning. In Danbury, Conn., where there were heavy downpours, officials said they had to rescue several people from their vehicles after they got stuck in floodwaters.

Rain from Hurricane Lee didn't contribute to the flooding earlier this week. But it could inundate parts of the coastal Northeast during the weekend, forecasters said. Lee is traveling north and could make landfall in Nova Scotia, Canada, possibly as a tropical storm, forecasters said.

Up to 300 people were evacuated by Tuesday morning in Leominster, about 40 miles northwest of Boston, Mayor Dean Mazzarella said.

UAW may have targeted strikes if deal not reached

Associated Press

DETROIT — Leaders of the United Auto Workers union are considering targeted strikes at a small number of factories run by each of Detroit's three automakers if they can't reach contract agreements by a Thursday night deadline.

The union's leadership discussed smaller-scale strikes at a meeting on Friday, and local union leaders were told about the strategy on Tuesday afternoon, two people with knowledge of the strategy said.

The people didn't want to be identified because they weren't authorized to disclose details until President Shawn Fain updates workers Wednesday af-

ternoon in a Facebook Live appearance.

At the Tuesday meeting, Fain didn't say whether the union would target vehicle assembly plants or component factories, one of the people said. Strikes at parts plants could force production halts at multiple assembly factories. He also didn't say how many workers would walk off their jobs.

Strikes at individual plants would be far less costly to the union, which would have to pay \$500 per week to each of its 146,000 members if it strikes against General Motors, Stellantis and Ford at the same time.

Reaching victims of Libya flood a struggle

Associated Press

DERNA, Libya — Search teams combed streets, wrecked buildings and even the sea for bodies in a devastated eastern Libyan city on Wednesday, where authorities said massive flooding had killed at least 5,100 people, with the toll expected to rise further.

Authorities were still struggling to get aid to the Mediterranean coastal city of Derna after Sunday night's deluge washed away most access

roads. Aid workers who managed to reach the city described devastation in its center, with thousands still missing and tens of thousands left homeless.

"Bodies are everywhere, inside houses, in the streets, at sea. Wherever you go, you find dead men, women, and children," Emad al-Falah, an aid worker from Benghazi, said over the phone from Derna. "Entire families were lost."

Mediterranean storm Daniel

caused deadly flooding in many towns of eastern Libya on Sunday, but the worst-hit was Derna.

Two dams outside in the mountains above the city collapsed, sending floodwaters washing down the Wadi Derna river and through the city center, sweeping away entire city blocks. Waves rose as high as 23 feet, Yann Fridez, head of the delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Libya, told broadcast-

er France24.

Derna lies on a narrow coastal plain on the Mediterranean Sea, under steep mountains running along the coast. Only two roads from the south remain usable, and they involve a long, winding route through the mountains.

Aid teams with some supplies managed to get in that way, while authorities in eastern Libya worked Wednesday to repair the faster coastal access routes.

Afghan soldier who crossed border given asylum in US

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

A former Afghan soldier who was arrested after walking from Brazil to Texas and whose case drew support from veterans groups and lawmakers was granted asylum in the United States after nearly a year of waiting, according to news reports, his brother and his lawyer.

Abdul Wasi Safi, known as Wasi, learned on Tuesday that a federal judge had waived his immigration hearing the day before. The surprise decision allows Wasi to resettle in the U.S.

"It was a miracle," his brother Sami-ullah Safi said Wednesday. "We went through a lot to get to this point, but we are so grateful for the support that we received."

Zachary Fertitta, one of Wasi's lawyers, also confirmed the decision in an email Wednesday.

"I was in shock, like, I say, 'Oh, my God, is it real?'" Wasi said in an interview with Military Times, which first reported the story.

Sami-ullah Safi told Stars and Stripes that he plans to help his brother find a job and make a new life in the Houston area.

Wasi served as an intelligence officer for the special operations corps of the U.S.-backed Afghan defense forces, according to a letter by his superior provided to Stars and Stripes.

He was unable to board an evacuation flight out of Kabul during the chaos following the fall of the Afghan government to the Taliban in August 2021.

Wasi, 27, feared retribution from the Taliban and hid in various safehouses. Family members and veterans groups paid for his passage to Pakistan and then Brazil in July 2022, according to the Texas Tribune, which began reporting on the issue last year.

Wasi flew to Sao Paulo and then three weeks later joined other migrants making the journey to the U.S., the Texas Tribune reported.

On Sept. 30, 2022, he was arrested when he tried to claim asylum after crossing the Rio Grande into Texas and was charged with illegally entering the country.

Criminal charges against him were dropped and he was released from detention in January, after two dozen veterans groups and several lawmakers wrote letters supporting him.

McCarthy shores up GOP support for Biden inquiry

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's sudden decision to launch an impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden appears to have won over even the most reluctant Republicans, and some GOP lawmakers are pushing for it to move quickly rather than drag into the 2024 election year.

McCarthy opened and closed a private meeting Wednesday of House Republicans justifying his reasoning for the inquiry sought by former President Donald Trump, the party's front-runner to challenge Biden next year.

The White House mobilized to fight allegations against the president regarding his son Hunter.

In a 14-page memo to news media leaders, the White House urged them to accurately report on "the Republicans' unprecedented, unfounded claims underlying an impeachment inquiry."

The moment is a politically pivotal one for the embattled Republican speaker McCarthy, whose job is targeted by Trump's right-flank allies mounting a daily effort to oust him.

In the inquiry, House Repu-

blicans are trying to link Biden to the business dealings of his son, Hunter Biden, and deflect attention away from Trump's own legal peril as the two men battle anew.

The sooner the better to go after Biden, some GOP lawmakers feel.

"I hope we can get it through as quickly as possible," said Rep. James Comer, R-Ky., the chairman of the Oversight Committee leading the impeachment inquiry.

Democrats are expected to oppose those Republican efforts as well as fight Biden's impeachment.

Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., who led the first impeachment of Trump, said McCarthy's failure to bring the inquiry before the full House for a vote was "an acknowledgment that he lacks the support in his conference to move forward."

Yet moderate Republicans representing districts that Biden won in 2020 over Trump and who are most at risk in next year's election generally were supportive of McCarthy's decision to launch the impeachment probe.

"I would have voted for it," said Rep. Mike Garcia, R-Calif., on the impeachment inquiry.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Water conservation set for Grand Canyon Park

AZ GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK — Grand Canyon National Park announced Tuesday that it is re-implementing mandatory water conservation measures for the South Rim due to diminished supplies.

Park officials said the water-saving measures were effective immediately as crews cannot pump water from Roaring Springs to the South Rim to replenish water stores.

They are working to re-establish water treatment and ensure drinking water is safe for the public.

Park officials said all park residents and visitors are being told to conserve and reduce water usage wherever possible in homes, hotel rooms and campgrounds.

Last year, the park implemented similar conservation measures on the South Rim in parts of July, August and September until the water tank levels returned to normal.

DraftKings apologizes for offer referencing 9/11

NJ ATLANTIC CITY — Sports betting company DraftKings apologized Monday after using the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks to entice people to bet on baseball and football games on the anniversary of the tragedy that killed nearly 3,000 people.

The Boston-based company offered users a 9/11-themed promotion that required three New York-based teams — the Yankees, Mets and Jets — to win their games Monday, the 22nd anniversary of the attacks

on the World Trade Center and Pentagon and the downing of a passenger jet in a field in Pennsylvania.

After an outcry on social media from people offended by the promotion titled “Never Forget,” DraftKings took it down and apologized.

“We sincerely apologize for the featured parlay that was shared briefly in commemoration of 9/11,” the company wrote. “We respect the significance of this day for our country and especially for the families of those who were directly affected.”

Maui to welcome back visitors next month

HI HONOLULU — Most of West Maui will officially reopen to travelers Oct. 8 under a new wildfire emergency proclamation signed on Friday by Hawaii Gov. Josh Green.

Nonessential travel to much of the island’s western coastline has been strongly discouraged since wildfires killed at least 115 people in the historic town of Lahaina last month.

State tourism officials initially urged travelers to stay away from Maui so residents and agencies could focus on emergency response efforts and supporting those displaced by the fires. In mid-August, officials began encouraging tourists to return to other parts of Maui, avoiding the burn zone and spending money to help the region recover.

Deputies who tased man multiple times are fired

CO DENVER — Two Colorado sheriff’s deputies were fired after an investigation found their repeated

use of Tasers against a man, including in his lower lip, was unjustified, the Las Animas County Sheriff’s Office confirmed Monday.

Deputy Mikhail Noel and Lt. Henry Trujillo violated a number of agency policies, including inappropriately using a Taser against Kenneth Espinoza while he was handcuffed and inaccurately reporting what happened, according to the Pueblo County Sheriff’s Office.

The events being investigated began when Espinoza’s son was pulled over on Nov. 29, 2022, for a traffic stop while his father was driving behind him. When Espinoza pulled off the road to support his son, Trujillo and Noel ordered him to leave.

After initially refusing, Espinoza was starting to drive away when the deputies ordered him to stay.

Noel, who said Espinoza tried to strike him with his truck, then pointed his gun at Espinoza, according to the report. Espinoza was handcuffed, told he was under arrest, taken to the patrol car and stunned with a Taser, the report found.

Wheel bounces over median, kills driver

IN INDIANAPOLIS — A wheel came off a pickup truck on an Indianapolis freeway, bounced over a median and crashed into the windshield of another vehicle, killing its driver Monday, police said.

The woman driving the second vehicle was pronounced dead at the scene of the subsequent crash around 7:45 a.m. along Interstate 70 on the city’s west side, Indiana State Police said. Lifesaving efforts failed.

The force of the collision caused the roof and the windshield of the second vehicle to collapse, police said. That vehicle then ran off the right side of the highway, into a steep ditch and through a fence.

Troopers found the severely damaged second vehicle lying on its side in the ditch, police said.

Tribes urge officials to deny loan for gas plant

WI MADISON — Indigenous tribes in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin have asked federal officials to deny a utility’s request for a loan to help build a natural gas-fired power plant on the shores of Lake Superior, calling the project unthinkable in the face of climate change.

Chippewa tribes located across the northern third of the three states sent a letter to U.S. Department of Agriculture officials on Sunday asking them to deny Dairyland Power Cooperative’s request for a \$350 million public loan. The request is intended to cover the utility’s share of the cost of building the Nemadji Trail Energy Center power plant.

Dairyland Power Cooperative, Minnesota Power and Basin Electric Cooperative have been working to gain permission to build the \$700 million power plant for more than three years. The utilities say using natural gas is a flexible means of producing electricity when wind and solar aren’t available and would serve as an alternative producer as utilities shut down coal-fired plants. The utilities hope the plant will be on-line by 2027.

— From wire reports

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Sanders raising No. 18 Colorado's profile

Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — The turnaround for a Colorado team that went 1-11 last season is happening at lightning speed. Just don't ask coach Deion Sanders about stopping to soak any of it in.

He's much too busy to fully wrap his mind around Boulder being the center of the college football universe.

"Santa don't have time. He's got to deliver the gifts. He ain't got time to enjoy his cookies. That's all he gets," Sanders said Tuesday as the 18th-ranked Buffaloes (2-0) prepare to host rival Colorado State (0-1) this weekend. "I've got to keep it going. I've got to keep this machine going, and make sure we stay on the right path and make sure we're locked in and we're focused on the right things.

"It's a lot driving this train. It's not easy."

Sanders has not only boosted Colorado's image on the field, but off it as well. Merchandise sales have increased roughly 525% from 2021. September is

already the second-biggest month ever on the school store's website. The biggest was December, when Sanders first joined Colorado from Jackson State.

What's more, Colorado's main athletics account has increased by 59% on Instagram since Sept. 1. There have been 29.3 million total impressions on Facebook between the school's main and football accounts.

And star power is flocking to Folsom Field to catch a glimpse of Sanders leading Colorado back to prominence. Hall of Fame receivers Terrell Owens and Michael Irvin made their way to the field last weekend. Even the hip-hop group Wu-Tang Clan showed up. This Saturday, ESPN's "College GameDay" and Fox's "Big Noon Kick-off" will be in town when Colorado hosts the Rams.

Sanders and his overhauled roster have transformed the Buffaloes into one of the hottest tickets around. The Buffs have sold out four games — including Colorado State — with another

(Oregon State, Nov. 4) close to being a full house. Should the Arizona game on Nov. 11 reach capacity, it would mark the first time in school history that all six home games were sellouts.

"The atmosphere was astonishing, impeccable. It's grand," Sanders said of the 53,241 fans at Folsom to see a 36-14 win over longtime rival Nebraska for his home debut last weekend. "First time ever, truly, experiencing that at the college level. Tremendous to see all the celebs ... and alumni. It was tremendous. And seeing the kids take the field at the conclusion of the game was unbelievable."

Yet his team is taking it all in stride — even if it seems almost surreal at times. Quarterback Shedeur Sanders, Deion's son, warmed up with Owens on the sideline last weekend.

"They all have been level-headed, down-to-earth people," receiver Xavier Weaver said when asked about having NFL greats around. "You think: 'Oh, he's in the Hall of Fame. He thinks he's better.' But he's just

like us. He's coming to teach us, coach us up, and stuff like that. You can ask any question you want. So it's a blessing."

The spotlight doesn't seem too big for the team, either. Then again, they're used to being followed by cameras for TV and YouTube content.

"I've been training and practicing for moments like these pretty much my whole life," said Weaver, who has 16 catches for 288 yards this season. "Now that we're on the stage that I want to be on, it's starting to come to light."

The mentality of the Buffaloes remains the same, he said, no matter if they're a big underdog (in a 45-42 win at TCU) or a slight favorite (Nebraska) or this week as heavy favorites (22½ points over Colorado State, according to FanDuel Sportsbook).

"Every game we're going to have a big target on our back, no matter who we play," Weaver said. "It could be Alabama we've got to play — we've got to come out strong."

No. 4 Texas trying to stay grounded after beating Alabama

Associated Press

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — The hype is coming for the Texas Longhorns like it hasn't in years. That's what happens when you knock off Alabama on the road and get your first win over a top-five team in 15 years.

The Longhorns, who vaulted seven spots to No. 4 in the AP Top 25 on Sunday following that 34-24 win, seem determined not to get swept up in it. It's still early September, after all. Alabama fell from third to 10th.

"Game over with," Longhorns receiver Xavier Worthy said, after it had been over with for about an hour. "We're on to Wyoming."

Yes, Wyoming. It's the kind of week-to-week focus that Texas needs to prove this team is really one of the nation's best after some hard times by the standards of a program with three AP national championships. Texas' last victory over a top-five opponent before this one: 45-39 over No. 1 Oklahoma in 2008.

Now, the Longhorns can move on to trying to win their first Big 12 Conference title since 2009 before they join Alabama in the Southeastern Conference.

Coach Steve Sarkisian's players seem to be taking his message to heart.

"This game's not going to define our season," Sarkisian said. "We've got 10 more regular-season games to play. I think it does serve as a good benchmark to us of what we're capable of and who we can be as a team moving forward."

This is hardly uncharted territory for the Texas program, or Sarkisian, who was offensive coordinator on Alabama's 2020 national championship team. It certainly isn't new for wide receiver Adonai Mitchell, who was part of two Georgia national championship teams and caught two fourth-quarter touchdown passes from Quinn Ewers.

But most of the Longhorns haven't gotten this kind of win before, or the accompanying attention. The last three coaches for one

of college football's five winningest programs have losing records against Top 25 teams, including Sarkisian (now 3-7).

"This is something that we embrace, something that we've got to take in and keep us moving," running back Jonathon Brooks said. "Use it to catapult us moving forward. We've got a long season ahead of us."

"The main thing for us is to not be complacent. We don't want to come out weak next week or the week after that. So just keep pushing."

The Longhorns got a star-making performance from Ewers, who passed for 349 yards and three touchdowns. They got big plays from receivers, and the defense racked up five sacks of Jalen Milroe.

In essence, Texas bullied an Alabama team that's been doing that to opponents throughout coach Nick Saban's tenure.

"It's still early," Ewers said. "We've got a lot of games left to play."

Rodgers faces long, arduous recovery

Associated Press

Aaron Rodgers ran onto the field carrying an American flag while a raucous crowd and millions of television viewers eagerly anticipated his debut with the New York Jets.

Soon, it was over.

Rodgers' season ended after just four snaps. Those realistic Super Bowl dreams turned into another nightmare for long-suffering Jets fans once it became clear Rodgers tore his left Achilles tendon.

An impressive comeback victory over turnover-prone Josh Allen and the Buffalo Bills couldn't hide the reality that the Jets will not have the four-time NFL MVP under center this season.

It's possible Rodgers may never complete a pass for New York.

The road to recovery for players coming off a torn Achilles is long and arduous. If he decides to play, Rodgers would be trying a comeback at age 40. Considering he's con-

templated retirement the past few years, it's unknown whether he will even want to return.

Typically, it takes players 9-12 months to recover from surgery for a torn Achilles. Some athletes have returned sooner.

"Studies have shown that age is the strongest predictor of outcome after an Achilles repair," said Dr. Peter DeLuca, Chief of Sports Medicine at Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center who spent more than 20 years as the team physician for the Philadelphia Eagles and Philadelphia Flyers. "So, the odds are not in his favor; however, there are other factors that play into this such as pre-existing degeneration of the tendon and there are always exceptions to the rule, particularly since he is in great physical condition."

DeLuca believes Rodgers would be able to throw by minicamp next spring and "should definitely" be able to play Week 1 in 2024.

"In general, 75% of NFL players return to play after an

Achilles repair," DeLuca said. "Their level of performance is decreased after the first year back but returns to baseline after 2-3 years."

Rodgers tore his Achilles after injuring his calf in training camp. Same thing happened to 13-time NBA All-Star Kevin Durant a few years ago.

DeLuca said there's no correlation between calf injuries and Achilles ruptures.

"There is low to very low evidence in the literature that previous muscle injury is a risk factor for Achilles tendon ruptures," DeLuca said.

Here's a list of several star players who suffered a torn Achilles in their 30s and returned to varying degrees of success:

Kobe Bryant: The Basketball Hall of Famer tore his Achilles on April 12, 2013, had surgery the next day and returned to the court with the Los Angeles Lakers on Dec. 8, 2013, at age 35. Bryant played only six games before a knee injury forced him to miss the rest of the season. Bryant aver-

aged 22.3 points in only 35 games in 2014-15.

Kevin Durant: The two-time NBA Finals MVP tore his Achilles on June 13, 2019 playing for Golden State in Game 4 of the championship round. He missed an entire season and came back with the Brooklyn Nets on Dec. 22, 2020, at age 32. Durant hasn't played more than 55 games in any season since his return but he's been elite.

Dominique Wilkins: The Basketball Hall of Famer tore his Achilles on Jan. 28, 1992. He returned to the court with the Atlanta Hawks on Nov. 6, 1992, just two months shy of turning 33. Wilkins averaged 29.9 points in his first season back.

Brandon Graham: The Philadelphia Eagles' defensive end tore his Achilles on Sept. 19, 2021, and returned for the season opener Sept. 11, 2022, at age 34. Graham had his best season as a pro last year.

Ryan Howard: The 2006 NL MVP tore his Achilles on a swing on Oct. 7, 2011. Howard returned to the lineup with the Phillies on July 6, 2021, at age 32. The big slugger was never the same, however.

Vikings aim to keep Cousins protected vs. Eagles

Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — Kirk Cousins took the third-down shotgun snap in the first quarter from the Minnesota 30-yard line and started his survey of the field.

He patted the ball once, began his throwing motion and was toppled to the turf by blitzing Tampa Bay safety Antoine Winfield Jr. Winfield knocked the ball loose upon impact and fell on it at the 18, setting the Buccaneers up for a field goal that proved to be the winning margin in the season opener last week.

As well as Cousins has typically performed on plays with an extra pass rusher, all it takes is one colossal whiff on a blitz such as Winfield's and the

whole game can go awry.

"Voided zones as a passer, you always feel good about. I think the key is it being picked up," Cousins said Tuesday with the Vikings in hastened preparation for their game Thursday at Philadelphia following that bitterly disappointing defeat to Tampa Bay.

Cousins, who was sacked twice and hit nine times against the Bucs, has the quick release, accurate touch and studious approach to take advantage of an extra rusher and complete a pass into the vacated zone.

According to Sportradar data, Cousins went 14-for-18 for 124 yards against five or more Buccaneers rushers. Since Cousins joined the Vikings in 2018, he has a 111.4 passer rating against

the blitz, trailing only Drew Brees and Patrick Mahomes in that span.

The Buccaneers were especially determined to send pressure when Cousins was in the shotgun.

Vikings coach Kevin O'Connell said there were some "unscouted" looks the Buccaneers gave them early in the game that they adjusted to quickly. Winfield blitzed on the second play of the game, too, pressuring Cousins into an incomplete pass he had to rush to Justin Jefferson to avoid a sack.

The Eagles will pose just as much of a challenge for the Vikings, if not more. They led the league last season in sacks per pass attempt and allowed the fewest passing yards. The Vik-

ings had plenty of prime-time trouble on the road in Week 2 against them last season, too.

"One of the best fronts, if not the best, in the league right now. We have a ton of respect for, not only the guys that you'll see in the starting units, but they've got kind of a first and second wave of problems defensively," O'Connell said.

"There's always going to be some things where a team can get you, especially in the opener or before things have been really put on tape yet based upon game-planning something that maybe they've done in the past and just giving a little bit different look. We've got to find ways to survive those downs and not turn the football over, and that's all 11 guys out there."

Olson ties Braves' season homer record

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Matt Olson tied the Braves' season home run record with 51 and Atlanta moved to the cusp of the NL East title, beating the Philadelphia Phillies 7-6 in 10 innings Tuesday night.

Marcell Ozuna hit a three-run shot and Ronald Acuña Jr. had a two-run homer for the Braves. After blowing a 6-1 lead, they won on Eddie Rosario's RBI single off Craig Kimbrel (7-6) that scored the automatic runner.

The Braves could wrap up their sixth straight division crown with a win Wednesday over the Phillies.

Olson is trying to pass Andruw Jones, who hit 51 in 2005.

The NL wild-card leading Phillies tied it on home runs in the ninth for the second straight day but failed to complete the comeback.

Yankees 3-4, Red Sox 2-1: Gleyber Torres keyed his team to its first doubleheader sweep at Fenway Park since 2006, leading visiting New York over Boston twice to get manager Aaron Boone his 500th career win.

Torres had a go-ahead, two-run single in the sixth inning and started a game-ending double play with the bases loaded in the opener of a day-night doubleheader opener. Then in the night game, Torres scored the go-ahead run on a bases-loaded grounder in the sixth and added an RBI single in the ninth.

Dodgers 11, Padres 2: Freddie Freeman homered, doubled and had four hits on his 34th birthday, Will Smith hit a three-run homer and host Los Angeles beat San Diego to trim its NL West magic number to five.

Cardinals 5, Orioles 2: Adam Wainwright (4-11) pitched five solid innings for his 199th win, and visiting St. Louis spoiled John Means' (0-1) return for Baltimore.

Brewers 3, Marlins 1: Josh Donaldson homered for the first time with his new team and Freddy Peralta (12-8) turned in another stellar outing to help host Milwaukee beat Miami.

Twins 3, Rays 2: Willi Castro hit a two-run home run in the seventh inning and host Minnesota rallied to beat Tampa Bay.

Mets 7, Diamondbacks 4: Ronny Mauricio hit his first major league homer, Pete Alonso launched his 44th of the season and host New York beat Arizona.

Athletics 6, Astros 2: Shea Langeliers and Tony Kemp homered and visiting Oakland jumped on Justin Verlander (11-8) early in a victory over Houston.

Rangers 6, Blue Jays 3: Robbie Grossman hit a two-run home run, Max Scherzer (13-6) pitched 5⅓ shutout innings before leaving because of a right triceps spasm and visiting Texas beat Toronto to leapfrog the Blue Jays in the AL wild-card race.

Guardians 3, Giants 1: Tyler Freeman hit a go-ahead two-run single in the sixth moments after San Francisco starter Sean Manaea (5-6) exited with the bases loaded, and Cleveland held on to win.

White Sox 6-10, Royals 2-11: Maikel García hit a tie-breaking single in the seventh inning after his team wasted a nine-run lead, and visiting Kan-

sas City hung on to beat Chicago for a doubleheader split.

In the opener, Dylan Cease won consecutive decisions for just the third time and the White Sox ended a strange run of losses when their pitchers struck out 14 or more — Chicago had been 0-11 this year.

Reds 6, Tigers 5 (10): Tyler Stephenson had an RBI single in the 10th inning in visiting Cincinnati's victory over Detroit.

Rockies 6, Cubs 4: Kris Bryant hit a go-ahead homer in the sixth inning and had three RBIs against his former team, helping host Colorado beat Chicago.

Mariners 8, Angels 0: J.P. Crawford hit a three-run double, Eugenio Suárez homered and had an early RBI single and host Seattle scored seven runs with two outs against Los Angeles.

Pirates 5, Nationals 1: Josh Palacios hit a two-run homer against his former team, Bailey Falter pitched six efficient innings and host Pittsburgh beat Washington.

Prosecutors: Porter broke girlfriend's vertebra in assault

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Houston Rockets guard Kevin Porter Jr.'s alleged attack on his girlfriend in a New York City hotel room left the woman with a fractured neck vertebra and a deep cut above her right eye, prosecutors revealed at his arraignment Tuesday.

Porter, 23, pleaded not guilty to felony assault and strangulation charges in connection with the incident early Monday at the Millennium Hilton near the United Nations in Manhattan. Prosecutors said he didn't stop until his girlfriend, former WNBA player Kysre Gondrezick, ran out into the hallway covered in blood.

The NBA star, who had been in police custody since his arrest around 6:45 a.m. Monday, was released after posting bail, which was set at \$75,000 cash or \$100,000 bond. He was also ordered to stay away from Gondrezick.

"This is a serious domestic violence case," Assistant Manhattan District Attorney Mirah Curzer said in court.

According to Curzer, Porter has a history of abusing Gondrezick, including an incident in which he rammed his car into hers.

Porter is due back in court in Manhattan on Oct. 16. The Rockets are scheduled to play a preseason game that day in San Antonio, with their regular season tipping off about two weeks later.

A message seeking comment was left with Porter's lawyer.

In a statement Monday, the Rockets said: "We are in the process of gathering information surrounding the matter involving Kevin Porter Jr. We have no further comment at this time."

According to a criminal complaint, Gondrezick told police that Porter punched her repeatedly in the face with a closed fist,

causing an inches-long gash above the right eye, bruising and substantial pain to her face.

Gondrezick, 26, said Porter also wrapped his hands around her neck and strangled her, causing her to have difficulty breathing, redness and bruising to her neck, and loss of motion to her left arm.

Hospital testing showed that Gondrezick sustained a fracture to one of the vertebrae in her neck, the criminal complaint said.

Gondrezick, the fourth pick in the 2021 WNBA Draft, played one season for the Indiana Fever and is currently a free agent. She is also an actress and model.

A message was left with Gondrezick's management company.

Porter has played four seasons in the NBA — a tenure marked by on-court prowess and off-court problems.

Last year, Porter averaged 19.2 points, 5.3 rebounds and 5.7 assists per game