

Brown, George confirmed despite hold

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Senate voted Wednesday to confirm Air Force Gen. CQ Brown as the next chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff as the chamber began circumventing a seven-month hold on military promotions by Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama.

Brown is the first of three generals Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., planned to push through the Senate in coming days. The second is Gen. Randy George, who was confirmed Thursday as the next Army chief of staff. The third is Gen. Eric Smith, who was nominated to be the next commandant of the Marine Corps.

“The Senate will overwhelmingly vote to confirm them, and these three honorable men will finally be able to assume their positions,” Schumer said.

Brown’s confirmation broke a deadlock over senior military promotions that still leaves some 300 general and flag officers in limbo.

Tuberville instigated his hold in February to force the Pentagon to end its policy of giving leave and travel reimbursement to service members seeking abortions and other reproductive health care.

Pressure to end Tuberville’s blockade climbed in recent weeks as Democrats and military officials detailed how frozen promotions and appointments impacted mili-

tary families and national security. On Tuesday, a veterans group decorated a lawn outside the Senate with signs displaying the names and photos of the stalled nominees.

Tuberville continues to obstruct the unanimous voice vote process normally used to confirm batches of military promotions but has repeatedly called on Schumer to vote on nominees one by one. The Congressional Research Service estimated that would take at least 700 hours.

Schumer had resisted putting individual nominees up for a floor vote, fearing it would set a damaging precedent, but relented Wednesday after Tuberville signaled he would attempt to force an individual vote on Smith. Schumer described Tuberville’s move as “an act of desperation.”

“We cannot allow Sen. Tuberville to set the Senate on a path that no senator wants to travel,” Schumer said. “We cannot allow Sen. Tuberville to decide which of our dedicated and brave service members get promoted and which get to languish, which military families are able to settle in their new posts and which must remain in limbo.”

Tuberville deemed the capitulation by Schumer a “win for the legislative branch of government” and said he reserves the right to again seek a cloture vote on an individual nominee — a procedural step that is typically only invoked by the Senate majority leader.

“There is nothing wrong with a floor vote

on these nominations,” Tuberville said.

“I ran for Senate so I could vote on behalf of the people of the state of Alabama. I didn’t come up here just to outsource my job to the Pentagon or the White House yet that’s exactly what Democrats want to do,” he said.

He dismissed concerns his hold was hurting military readiness and said Schumer is ultimately responsible for letting the logjam of nominees grow to its current size. Still, Tuberville voted Wednesday against a cloture motion to end debate on Brown’s nomination as well as the final vote to confirm him.

“Nothing demonstrates that Sen. Tuberville is the sole cause of this crisis better than his vote against cloture on Gen. CQ Brown today,” said Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. “It’s really quite something that he was willing to file a cloture motion earlier today, and ended up voting against a cloture motion a few hours later.”

Brown was approved by the Senate panel, of which Tuberville is a member, during the summer. He will become just the second Black man, after Colin Powell, to serve as the president’s most senior military adviser when Army Gen. Mark Milley retires at the end of the month.

George, meanwhile, was approved Thursday in a 96-1 vote, with one Republican senator objecting.

Zelenskyy makes case for support in Washington

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made a whirlwind return visit to Washington on Thursday to shore up U.S. support for Ukraine, delivering an upbeat message on the war’s progress while facing new questions about the flow of American dollars that for 19 months has helped keep his troops in the fight against Russian forces.

Zelenskyy, in long-sleeve ol-

ive drab, came to the Capitol with a firm message in private talks with Republican and Democratic leaders. The Ukrainians have a solid war plan, and “they are winning,” lawmakers quoted him as assuring them, at a time that the world is watching Western support for Kyiv.

He was also planning to speak with military leaders at the Pentagon and was to meet with President Joe Biden at the White House.

House Republican leaders had promised tough questions for Zelenskyy on his plans for winning Ukraine’s counteroffensive against invading Russian forces, as the war moves closer to the two-year mark and marks months without major breakthroughs in Russia’s heavily mined lines.

Zelenskyy “conceded that it’s tough, very tough to overcome entrenched defenses,” Independent Sen. Angus King said.

“They believe they will make slow but steady progress, but it’s not going to be quick.”

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who faces tough opposition on support for Ukraine among followers aligned with former President Donald Trump, notably chose not to join in greeting the Ukrainian president before the cameras. That left House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries to escort Zelenskyy into the Capitol.

Top USAF official warns of Russia-Iran cooperation

Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates — Iran's supplying of bomb-carrying drones to Russia could see Moscow help Tehran's program become more lethal, raising risks across the wider Middle East, the top U.S. Air Force commander in the Middle East said Wednesday.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich, the head of U.S. Air Force Central, described the danger potentially posed by Russia's "cooperation and collusion" with Iran as extending from the airspace over Syria, while Tehran threatens commercial ships in the waters of the Persian Gulf.

American pilots have already faced what they describe as more aggressive maneuvers from Russian pilots in Syria, while a new deployment of U.S. air power has been sent to protect commercial shipping in the Gulf's key Strait of Hormuz, through which 20% of all the world's oil passes.

"I am concerned about the growing relationship between Russia and Iran and the drones being supplied to Russia," Grynkeiwich told journalists during a news conference at the U.S. Embassy in Abu Dhabi. "Who would have ever thought that the Russian Federation would need to go to Iran for military capabilities, and yet we're there. That means that Russia actually owes Iran something. I'm concerned about the level of collaboration that might happen."

Iran's mission to the United Nations and the Russian Embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment.

Tehran has offered conflicting explanations about the drones Russia has used to target Ukraine during its war on the country, at times denying arming Moscow while also saying it provided some before the war on Ukraine began. Western nations, Ukraine

and experts who have forensically examined the drones link them back to Iran and say their vast number deployed on the battlefield show a constant resupplying by Tehran.

Grynkeiwich said he was worried that Russian upgrades to Iran's drone technology could "backcast" to Tehran, making those bomb-carrying devices even more dangerous. And by Russia owing Iran for the munitions, it could return the favor by dialing up the pressure on American pilots who still fly over Syria and Iraq as part of a mission to target the remnants of Islamic State.

"There could be some amount of cooperation and collusion between Russia and Iran that's playing out here in Syria. We'll see where that goes," Grynkeiwich said. "It is something that we watch very closely. That burgeoning relationship is of a military concern to me."

Meanwhile, Russian pilots over recent months have been aggressive in flying close to both manned F-35 fighter jets and drones over Syria. The Air Force publicly showed a Russian pilot dumping fuel on a drone and trying to set it alight with flares.

But Grynkeiwich described some of that behavior as dialing back in recent weeks.

"I'm not attributing causality to the fact that we called them out, but by showing the unprofessional nature of their behavior since that time, they do still intercept our MQ-9 (drones) from time to time, but it is in a much safer manner," he said. "I would still characterize it as unprofessional because it is not in accordance with established rules that we have where we stay certain distances apart, but it is safe at this time."

The U.S. and Russia still operate a "deconfliction line" to make sure their aircraft don't run into each other or come too close.

Bells sound at bases to honor fallen sailors

BY JENNESSA DAVEY

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Almost 200 sailors who died on duty throughout the Navy in the past year were honored Thursday morning at the homeport of the U.S. 7th Fleet with flowers, kind words and support from fellow sailors and their families.

About 100 people attended the Navy Gold Star Program's Bells Across America for Fallen Service Members event at Kosano Park on the naval base.

The eighth annual Bells Across America, an hourlong ceremony, was held at U.S. bases worldwide. Yokosuka Naval Base, the headquarters of U.S. Naval Forces Japan, marked the event for the third time.

"It's important for us to be there for each other, especially as we remember the service and the sacrifice (of those sailors), but also the sacrifice that continues to be made by their families," base commander Capt. Les Sobol told Stars and Stripes at the event.

The ceremony opened with a chaplain's prayer, followed by

words from Sobol. Thirty volunteer sailors standing in formation in their summer white uniforms read the names of 196 fallen sailors from the past year.

Among the names was Petty Officer 2nd Class Miguel Cortes, an aviation ordnanceman at Yokosuka who died Aug. 24 at a local hospital after he collided on his motorcycle with another motorist outside a base gate.

Yuko Bivins, a Gold Star family member at the ceremony, remembered her late husband, Cmdr. Frank Bivins, who died of cancer in 2017, according to his obituary.

"It's been six years since my husband passed away, but coming back here, together with everyone, means a lot, and I can remember my husband and what he has done," she said.

After the reading of fallen sailors' names, Sobol, followed by the sailors, brought a flower to the front of the gathering. Then Gold Star family members came forward and finally anyone else at the ceremony. Taps and a prayer brought the ceremony to an end.

Japan orders Okinawa to resume USMC airfield work

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE

AND MARI HIGA

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A Japanese Cabinet minister this week gave Okinawa's governor until Wednesday to approve design changes for a coastal airfield planned to replace Marine Corps Air Station Futenma or face further legal action from Tokyo.

Tetsuo Saito, the minister of land, infrastructure, transport and tourism, on Tuesday notified

Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki by letter that the prefecture must approve the changes for a Marine Corps runway under construction at Oura Bay in northeastern Okinawa, a spokesman from the prefectural Department of Civil Engineering and Construction said by phone Thursday. If the governor denies the permits again, Tokyo will again order approval. If Tamaki continues to resist, Tokyo may file suit, the spokesman said.

Test vote fails after McCarthy cedes on cuts

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Kevin McCarthy emerged with a spending cut plan to avert a looming federal government shutdown by appeasing his hard-right flank, only to see it quickly collapse Thursday in a crushing defeat, the next steps uncertain.

His latest attempt to move ahead with a traditionally popular defense funding bill as a first step toward keeping the government running was shattered by a core group of Republican colleagues who refused to vote with the increasingly endangered speaker.

A test vote to advance the bill failed, 212-216, as a handful of Republicans joined with Democrats to stop it. It was the third

time that McCarthy, R-Calif., has been stymied, and once again the House came to a sudden standstill.

The open revolt was further evidence that McCarthy's strategy of repeatedly giving in to the conservatives is seemingly only emboldening them. A handful of GOP lawmakers, urged on by Donald Trump, the party's early front-runner for the 2024 presidential nomination, has run roughshod over their own House majority.

Trump urged the conservatives to hold the line against the higher funding levels McCarthy had agreed to with President Joe Biden earlier this year and to end the federal criminal indictments against him.

"This is also the last chance to

defund these political prosecutions against me and other Patriots," Trump wrote on social media. "They failed on the debt limit, but they must not fail now. Use the power of the purse and defend the Country!"

A federal shutdown looms Sept. 30, the end of the current budget year, if Congress cannot pass the bills needed to fund the government or approve a short-term measure to keep Washington running while negotiations continue.

"We need the extreme MAGA Republicans to get their act together," said House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York.

"End the civil war," Jeffries urged the Republicans. "Get your act together."

The White House and Democrats, along with some Republicans, warn that a shutdown would be devastating for people who rely on their government for everyday services and would undermine America's standing in the world.

Moving forward with the defense bill was supposed to be a way for McCarthy to build goodwill among the GOP House majority as he tries to pass a more temporary bill just to keep the government open.

Many on the right flank want to see progress on the 12 individual appropriations bills that would fund the various federal departments at the lower levels these lawmakers are demanding before they give their votes for any stopgap measure.

Jeep maker offers new deal amid possibly more strikes

Associated Press

General Motors and Stellantis announced fresh layoffs Wednesday that they blamed on damage from the United Auto Workers strike, and the labor standoff grew more tense just two days before the union was expected to call for new walkouts.

Stellantis provided a glimmer of hope for a breakthrough by giving the union a new contract proposal. However, a company spokeswoman said the offer primarily covered non-economic issues.

It was not clear whether the Stellantis offer would satisfy union President Shawn Fain, who vows to announce new strike targets on Friday unless there is "serious progress" toward agreements with GM, Stellantis and Ford.

So far UAW workers are striking at just three factories, one for each company. It's a novel approach for the union, which in the past has focused

negotiations on one company and limited a 2019 strike to GM. Fain says his approach will keep the companies guessing about UAW's next move.

"He is trying to distinguish himself from the old leadership of the UAW," said Harry Katz, a professor of collective bargaining at Cornell University. "He's different, he's tough, and he's trying to put pressure on the companies."

The three-plant strike has so far had limited impact on the automakers — probably by design, longtime industry observers say.

"The strategy is to incrementally apply pressure on the companies to encourage them to come to the table," said Marick Masters, a management professor at Wayne State University in Detroit. "He is negotiating with the three companies simultaneously with the expectation that the one that is most vulnerable and will give them the best deal will surface from that strategy."

Mom of boy who shot teacher may be jailed over drug tests

Associated Press

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. — The mother of a 6-year-old who shot his teacher in Virginia could be jailed Thursday for failing drug tests while awaiting sentencing on federal weapons charges that she used marijuana while possessing a firearm.

A bond revocation hearing is set in federal court in Newport News for Deja Taylor. Her son used her gun to shoot Abby Zwerner in her classroom in January. The first-grade teacher was seriously wounded and had multiple surgeries.

Taylor pleaded guilty in June to using marijuana while possessing a firearm. Authorities say she also lied about her drug use on a federal background check form when she bought the gun that her son brought to school.

A judge had set an October sentencing date and released Taylor on bond under the conditions that she submit to drug tests and receive addiction

treatment.

But Taylor has twice tested positive for marijuana and once for cocaine, federal prosecutors wrote in a filing with the court this month. She also missed two drug tests and two drug treatment sessions, they said.

"These violations are serious and call into question the defendant's danger to the community, respect for the law and this Court's Orders," Assistant U.S. Attorneys Lisa McKeel and Peter Osyf wrote.

James Ellenson, an attorney for Taylor, said his client doesn't dispute the prosecutors' allegations. But he argued against incarceration in a court filing, stating that Taylor has made "substantial positive developments."

She's taken four more drug tests since Aug. 25, Ellenson said. And while they've been positive for marijuana, "the levels are decreasing and show that Ms. Taylor is abstaining from this drug," Ellenson wrote.

\$600M in funding to produce COVID tests

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration announced Wednesday that it is providing \$600 million in funding to produce new at-home COVID-19 tests and is restarting a website allowing Americans to again order up to four free tests per household — aiming to prevent possible shortages during a rise in coronavirus cases that has typically come during colder months.

The Department of Health and Human Services says orders can be placed at COVID-Tests.gov starting Sept. 25, and that no-cost tests will be delivered for free by the United States Postal Service.

Twelve manufacturers that employ hundreds of people in seven states from California to Maryland have been awarded funding and will produce 200 million over-the-counter tests to replenish federal stockpiles for

government use, in addition to producing enough tests to meet demand for tests ordered online, the department said.

The new effort is meant to guard against supply chain issues that sparked some shortages of at-home COVID tests made overseas during past surges in coronavirus cases. But it also illustrates the political balance President Joe Biden is trying to strike as he seeks reelection next year between trumpeting

his administration having led the country through the worst of the pandemic while also trying to better prepare for the continued effects of a virus that persists.

Dawn O'Connell, assistant secretary for preparedness and response at HHS, said that though some portions of the public may be tired of the pandemic and its implications, at home-testing remains a key way to slow the spread of new cases.

Biden set to create office of gun violence prevention

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is creating the first-ever federal office of gun violence prevention, according to two people familiar with the plans.

The office will coordinate efforts across the federal government and will offer help and guidance to states struggling with increasing gun violence, while taking the lead on implementation of the bipartisan gun legislation signed into law last year. Biden tentatively plans to announce the new effort with an event Friday at the White House, said the people, who had direct knowledge of the plans and who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The office fulfills a key demand of gun safety activists who banded together as a coalition to endorse Biden for president in 2024, and is an effort by the White House to keep the issue front-and-center as the president pushes for a ban on so-called “assault weapons” and urges Congress to act.

“The creation of an Office of Gun Violence Prevention in the White House will mark a turning point in how our federal government responds to an epidemic that plagues every state and every community in America,” said Kris Brown, president of the gun safety group Brady, which has advocated for the office since 2020.

“Tackling this epidemic will take a whole-of-government approach, and this new office

would ensure the executive branch is focused and coordinated on proven solutions that will save lives.”

Greg Jackson, the executive director of the Community Justice Action Fund, and Everytown for Gun Safety’s Rob Wilcox are expected to hold roles in the newly created office, which White House staff secretary Stef Feldman will oversee, the people said.

“There are few people who care more about the work of gun violence prevention than President Biden,” said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., who has drafted legislation with Rep. Maxwell Frost, D-Fla., that would create such an office. “Establishing a White House office dedicated to this fight will save thousands of lives and

strengthen the federal government’s implementation of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.”

Firearms are the No. 1 killer of children in the U.S., and so far this year 220 children younger than 11 have died by guns and 1,049 between the ages of 12 and 17 have died. As of 2020, the firearm mortality rate in the U.S. for those under age 19 is 5.6 per 100,000. The next comparable is Canada, with 0.08 deaths per 100,000.

But Republican support for gun restrictions is slipping a year after Congress passed the most comprehensive firearms control legislation in decades with bipartisan support, according to a recent poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

US unemployment benefits applications fall by 20,000

Associated Press

U.S. applications for unemployment benefits fell to their lowest level in eight months last week as the labor market continues to show strength in the face of elevated interest rates.

U.S. applications for jobless claims fell by 20,000 to 201,000 for the week ending Sept. 16, the Labor Department reported

ed Thursday. That’s the lowest figure since the last week of January.

Jobless claim applications are seen as representative of the number of layoffs in a given week.

The four-week moving average of claims, a less volatile measure, fell by 7,750 to 217,000.

Though the Federal Reserve

opted to leave its benchmark borrowing rate alone this week, it is well into the second year of its battle to stamp out four-decade-high inflation. The whopping 11 interest rate hikes since March of last year have helped to curb price growth, but the U.S. economy and labor market have held up better than most expected.

Earlier this month, the gov-

ernment reported that U.S. employers added a healthy 187,000 jobs in August. Though the unemployment rate ticked up to 3.8%, it’s still low by historical measures.

U.S. businesses have been adding an average of about 236,000 jobs per month this year, down from the pandemic surge of the previous two years, but still a strong number.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

AG: Kidnap plot acquittals from 'right-leaning' jurors

M DETROIT — Michigan's attorney general suggested conservative politics played a role in the acquittal of three men in the final trial related to a plan to kidnap Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

Dana Nessel, also a Democrat, told a liberal group Monday the trial was held in a "very right-leaning county."

She said last Friday's verdicts were "perplexing, confusing but terrifying." The Detroit News obtained a video of Nessel's remarks to a group called Protectors of Equality in Government.

William Null, twin brother Michael Null and Eric Molitor were found not guilty of providing material support for a terrorist act and a weapon charge. They were the last of 14 men to face charges in state or federal court. Nine were convicted and a total of five were cleared.

Rattlesnake bites, injures Amazon driver on delivery

FL PALM CITY — An Amazon driver is in serious condition after being bitten by a rattlesnake while making a delivery to a Florida home, officials said Tuesday.

The woman placed a box next to the home's front door Monday evening when the eastern diamondback snake jumped out and bit her, the Martin County Sheriff's Office said in a news release. She immediately became ill and called out for help.

She was taken to the hospital, where the sheriff's office said she was in "very serious" condition Tuesday. Officials caught the snake and it was euthanized.

Eastern diamondbacks can grow to about 7 feet in length. The toxinology.com website maintained by an Australian university says the eastern diamondback's bite is fatal in 10% to 20% of cases if not treated.

Man accused in deaths of 22 women killed in prison

TX DALLAS — A man accused of killing nearly two dozen older women and who was convicted last year in the slayings of two was killed Tuesday morning by his cellmate at a Texas prison, an official said.

Billy Chemirmir, 50, was found dead in his cell, said Texas Department of Criminal Justice spokeswoman Hannah Haney. She said that Chemirmir's cellmate, who is serving a sentence for murder, was identified as the assailant, but said she couldn't release his identity or how Chemirmir was killed.

Authorities said Chemirmir preyed on older women in the Dallas area over a two-year span, killing them and stealing their valuables. He was caught after a 91-year-old woman survived an attack in 2018.

Unlicensed acupuncturist charged after woman hurt

NY NEW YORK — A New York City man has been charged with performing acupuncture without a license after he punctured a woman's lungs during treatment, sending her to a hospital for emergency surgery, prosecutors announced.

Yong De Lin, 66, was arraigned on four criminal charges Monday in connection with unlicensed treatments he

performed on 63-year-old Shujuan Jiang between May and October of last year, Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz said.

According to the indictment, Jiang, 63, visited a medical office in Queens on May 10, 2022, for relief of stomach and back pain, and was introduced to Lin.

Lin administered 17 treatments to Jiang over the next several months even though he is not a licensed acupuncturist, Katz said.

Jiang began to feel unwell during an Oct. 28 session, so Lin performed additional acupuncture and a cupping treatment and sent Jiang home, Katz said in a news release.

Jiang collapsed on the sidewalk on her way home, Katz said. Jiang was taken to a hospital where it was determined that both of her lungs had collapsed because of the acupuncture treatments. Lifesaving surgery was performed and Jiang remained hospitalized for six days.

Witness: Man was punched at NFL game before dying

MA DEDHAM — A man who died at a New England Patriots home game last weekend was punched at least twice in the head during a fight in the stands with a rival fan, a witness said Tuesday.

Police and safety personnel responded to the upper deck at Gillette Stadium shortly before 11 p.m. Sunday and found Dale Mooney, 53, of Newmarket, N.H., "in apparent need of medical attention," the Norfolk County district attorney's office said in a statement Monday.

Mooney was taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced

dead. The Massachusetts State Police are investigating what the district attorney termed an "incident" at the stadium.

Witness Joey Kilmartin shot video of what he said was a brutal fight. In interviews with several local media outlets, Kilmartin said he saw Mooney, a Patriots fan, confront a Miami Dolphins fan who he had been arguing with during most of the game, which the Dolphins won.

"He basically engaged in mutual combat with another fan," Kilmartin told The Boston Globe. "A lot of people started trying to pull them apart. ... It looked like somebody was in the middle of them, and then a man in the Dolphins jersey reached over and he connected with two punches to the victim's head."

State makes it easier for drivers to register to vote

PA HARRISBURG — Gov. Josh Shapiro's administration said starting Tuesday it is making it easier for someone to register to vote when they are getting or renewing a driver's license in Pennsylvania.

Under the new format, prompts on the computer screens in driver's license centers will take the user to a template to register to vote. That leaves it up to them to choose not to register. Previously, prompts first asked the user whether they wanted to register to vote.

Twenty-three other states and Washington, D.C., already have varying models of what is called "automatic voter registration," according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

— From wire reports

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Notre Dame, Ohio St. to meet in test of strength

Associated Press

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Notre Dame coach Marcus Freeman sees the numbers.

He knows the ninth-ranked Fighting Irish are near the bottom of the FBS in sacks per game. He's also aware his team has the nation's top passing efficiency defense and is eager to see if it will pass the unit's biggest test so far — Saturday against No. 6 Ohio State.

"Everybody keeps talking about sacks," Freeman said. "I told coach (Al) Golden, we're No. 1 in the country in pass efficiency defense, so that's the stat I'm worried about. I'm not worried about sacks."

Despite recording just six sacks, the Irish (4-0) have held opposing quarterbacks to a pass efficiency rating of 84.3 and already have 40 pass breakups — six more than they had all of last season.

Freeman thinks the disparity demonstrates there are other ways to rattle opposing quarter-

backs. According to Pro Football Focus, Notre Dame has 70 pressures this season. Opponents, meanwhile, have completed 44.3% of their throws for just 5.2 yards per attempt and two TDs. Notre Dame ranks in the top 15 of the 133 FBS teams in all three categories.

It helps, of course, when receivers rarely get open.

But after starting this season against run-heavy Navy and FCS foe Tennessee State before facing North Carolina State on a soggy field and Central Michigan's backup quarterback, Notre Dame now faces one of the nation's highest-scoring teams.

The Buckeyes (3-0) rely heavily on All-American receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., a Heisman hopeful whose father spent his entire Hall of Fame career with the Indianapolis Colts. He caught two passes and hurt his shoulder in the opener at Indiana, but now has 14 receptions, 304 yards and three TDs.

Ohio State also has receiver

Emeka Egbuka, who has 12 catches, 167 yards and three TDs after topping 1,000 yards last year, and tight end Cade Stover, who chose one more college season over the NFL.

"You're dealing with speed, length, (a wide) catch radius, the ability to win a one-on-one," Golden said when asked about Harrison before turning his attention to the rest of the Buckeyes. "That's a really, really potent offense."

The biggest question in Columbus is whether three new offensive line starters can protect quarterback Kyle McCord, the successor to two-time Heisman finalist C.J. Stroud. McCord also struggled against the Hoosiers and their pass rush, but looked much more comfortable against Western Kentucky and Youngstown State. The Hilltoppers recorded only two pressures last weekend.

McCord also has something to prove — that he can excel against a defense built to slow teams

down and on the road in one of college football's most famous stadiums.

"I'm glad we went through those games to get to this point with some of the new faces we have," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. "We did work out some of the issues, and so I'm excited to get on the field and go play this one now."

The Irish seem uniquely equipped to defend the Buckeyes.

Ben Morrison, a preseason second-team All-American, anchors the secondary after intercepting six passes last season as a freshman. He's teaming with Cam Hart. Opponents are 7 of 22 for 100 yards when targeting Notre Dame's starting cornerbacks. Nickel cornerback Thomas Harper and safety Xavier Watts play a physical style, batting away passes and blitzing quarterbacks.

"We're going to play a heck of an opponent Saturday," Freeman said. "So we'll see how good this football team really is."

No. 4 FSU will look to avenge Clemson's 7 straight series wins

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Once a heated Atlantic Coast Conference rivalry, the Florida State-Clemson series has become a lopsided affair.

The Tigers have won seven in a row against the Seminoles, including five by double digits and four in Death Valley. No one needs to remind No. 4 Florida State about the past. And no one needs to educate coach Mike Norvell's team about the present — or what's at stake Saturday.

"I don't think there's going to be a whole lot of motivational talks needed," Norvell said.

The Seminoles understand how important this game is to their ACC title hopes and their College Football Playoff chances. Fittingly, it's a high noon showdown.

"We'll be able to sit here (at) 3:30, 3:45 on Saturday and know whether we accomplished that or we didn't," Norvell said. "I've got a lot of confidence in what we'll be able to do, and I'll be able to live with whatever the result."

The Seminoles (3-0, 1-0 ACC) are 2½-point favorites, according to FanDuel

Sportsbook. It's the first time Clemson (2-1, 0-1) has been a home underdog since facing eventual Heisman Trophy winner Lamar Jackson and Louisville in 2016. The Tigers escaped that one 42-36.

Clemson has won a bunch since, too. The two-time national champion (2016, '18) and the 2019 runner-up has taken seven of the last eight ACC titles.

FSU, meanwhile, has gone through two coaching changes — moving from Jimbo Fisher to Willie Taggart to Norvell — and a seismic rebuild. Now, Norvell's team has won nine in a row and appears ready for the Tigers.

The Seminoles consider last week's 31-29 squeaker at Boston College more of a wake-up call than cause for concern. Maybe they overlooked the Eagles. Maybe they were looking ahead to the Tigers. Either way, it provided them extra motivation this week.

"It was definitely a lesson learned," standout defensive end Jared Verse said. "You can't look down on any opponent you go up against. Everybody has a hit out on us. They

want to get us.

"Everybody's got something they want to prove against us. They did that. We can't let that happen again. We got to go out there and play how we play. We're the top team and we can't ever let that ever happen again."

The Seminoles pulled away from then-No. 5 LSU in the season opener, routed Southern Miss the following week and then struggled at Boston College. Despite the ups and downs, they still managed to extend their scoring mark to nine consecutive games with 30 or more points. It's the longest active streak in the ACC.

FSU has averaged just 19 points in the seven-game series skid.

An experienced group filled with transfers, the Seminoles have little use for what happened last year or long ago. Clemson has had FSU's number for the better part of the past decade, a trend that could change in the span of a few hours Saturday.

"I heard it's a hostile environment," Verse said. "I'm excited for it. This is what I came here for."

Vikings acquire RB Akers from Rams

Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — The run-deficient Minnesota Vikings acquired running back Cam Akers in a trade with the Los Angeles Rams on Wednesday after the fourth-year player fell out of favor with the coaching staff and behind Kyren Williams on the depth chart.

The Vikings sent a 2026 conditional sixth-round draft pick to the Rams for Akers and a 2026 conditional seventh-round pick in the deal, which was pending Akers passing a physical.

Akers, who was the 52nd overall pick in the 2020 draft out of Florida State, tore his Achilles tendon during the 2021 preseason but recovered quickly enough to contribute in the playoffs during the Rams' run to a Super Bowl title. Vikings coach Kevin O'Connell, offensive coordinator Wes Phillips and quarterbacks coach Chris

O'Hara were Rams assistants during Akers' first two years there.

Last season, Akers started slowly and clashed with the coaches. He was sent away from the team at midseason while the Rams tried to trade him. He returned after the deadline passed without a deal and ramped up his production, recording three straight 100-yard games to close out a dismal season for the then-reigning champions.

After the surprise retirement of Sony Michel, Akers was the clear front-runner to be the featured ball carrier for coach Sean McVay's pass-centric offense.

"I know I deserve to be a starter in this league, so this is the year. Keep my head down, go to work, prove myself," Akers said after reporting to training camp.

But after the Rams put the second-year player Williams ahead of him in the pecking or-

der, they renewed their attempt to trade Akers. The Vikings were a natural fit given their coaches' familiarity with him and their league-low 69 rushing yards.

"I think he did a lot of really good things, and I think Cam is a quality player. I think sometimes it boils down to, 'All right, is it a fit?'" McVay said on Monday after confirming the Rams were again trying to deal Akers. "This isn't an indictment on any individual. I really care a lot about Cam, and I'm appreciative of some of the challenging things that we've gone through and where we ended up getting to in terms of our relationship and our ability to communicate clearly."

The market value of running backs has never been lower in the NFL, as evidenced by the pennies-on-the-dollar trade compensation going to the Rams. By finding a trade part-

ner, they at least saved \$1.29 million off their cap.

The Vikings released four-time Pro Bowl pick Dalvin Cook during the summer and turned their backfield over to Alexander Mattison, with second-year player Ty Chandler and recent pickup Myles Gaskin backing him up. Akers will have an opportunity to factor into that mix.

O'Connell has stressed the need to have a more efficient rushing attack, even if the Vikings are built around Kirk Cousins passing to Justin Jefferson and company. The coaches spent the extra time after the loss last Thursday at Philadelphia revisiting their strategy around the running game.

"So much of it just comes back to simple elements of technique, fundamentals, understanding of what we're trying to get done," O'Connell said Wednesday before the trade was made.

Bills LB Milano keeps quiet, marches to his own beat

Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Buffalo Bills linebacker Matt Milano is a player of numerous accolades and very few words, even when it comes to the topic of his musical tastes.

Milano's eyes lit up Wednesday when informed some of his teammates revealed he was a fan of house music.

"I don't know nothing about that," the seventh-year player said, laughing. "They're just making up (stuff)."

As for what Milano might be into, the 2022 All-Pro player provided a blunt response.

"I'm into football," he said.

It's a perfect answer from a player who is as intensely focused on keeping his life private, as Milano is running down an opponent.

Whether true or not, the house music connection is not lost on

many of Milano's teammates because the "boom, boom, boom" beat of the sound reflects the familiar constant thud of tackles he makes during games.

"It's usually just him laying the wood, you know, boom, boom, left and right," said running back Damien Harris, who faced Milano twice a year during his first four seasons with the division-rival Patriots before signing with Buffalo this offseason. "You always know where 58 is on the field."

Milano has not lost a step two games into his seventh season, with Buffalo (1-1) preparing play at Washington (2-0) on Sunday.

And Milano is doing so while adapting to a new defensive system to accommodate Buffalo losing starting middle linebacker Tremaine Edmunds in free agency. Undersized second-

year linebacker Terrel Bernard has taken over Edmunds' spot, and the Bills have incorporated Taylor Rapp to play a safety/linebacker role during passing situations.

Known for his ability to penetrate the backfield, drop back in coverage and his sideline-to-sideline range, Milano is second on the team in having had a hand in 12 tackles, and leads Buffalo with two interceptions.

The first came when he dropped back into coverage and easily picked off Zach Wilson in a season-opening 22-16 overtime loss at the Jets. His next one came Sunday, when Milano jumped over the back of Raiders running back Josh Jacobs to cleanly catch Jimmy Garoppolo's pass in a 38-10 win.

"I actually had a pretty good vantage point to see it unfold, and just amazing," coach Sean

McDermott said. "It's weird, though, because I almost expected Matt to do that when I saw the position he was in."

His dual abilities against the run and pass are the result of Milano's experience playing safety at Boston College. The question mark for Milano entering the 2017 draft was how his 6-foot-1, 220-pound frame would translate to the NFL because he was regarded as being too slow to play safety and too small to play linebacker.

Selected in the fifth-round by Buffalo, Milano quickly found a fit in the Bills' defense and has been a starter since late in his rookie season.

"That boy can do it all, man," safety Micah Hyde said. "He's no longer our secret on defense, because the word's definitely getting out. He's making too many plays."

Messi to miss another game for Inter Miami

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Lionel Messi returned to Inter Miami's lineup on Wednesday night. It was a short-lived comeback, and now he's sidelined again.

Messi was subbed off in the 37th minute of Inter Miami's match against Toronto, after spending a few minutes laboring with what appeared to be a leg issue. Miami came up big without him, winning 4-0 to move within five points of the final playoff spot in Major League Soccer's Eastern Conference.

Robert Taylor, who came on for Messi, had two goals and an assist. But Messi's status overshadowed everything, and Inter Miami coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said after the game that the Argentine star will miss Sunday's game at Orlando.

"He had an old injury that had been bothering him," Martino said, as relayed through a team official who translated his re-

marks from Spanish to English.

In an earlier answer that was not translated, Martino said Messi would miss at least one more match. The 36-year-old Messi had missed two matches — one for club, the other for country — in recent days, after sitting out Argentina's World Cup qualifying win at Bolivia on Sept. 12, and Inter Miami's 5-2 loss at Atlanta United this past Saturday.

Fatigue was cited in both cases, and the team did not provide any diagnosis of what is troubling the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner now. The game was scoreless when Messi was subbed out.

It was the second big injury blow for Inter Miami on Wednesday. Jordi Alba — another celebrated midseason addition — had to leave in the 34th minute, shortly before Messi's night was over. Alba will not play Sunday, either.

"We had to step up," Taylor said.

Facundo Farias and second-half sub Benjamin Cremaschi had the other goals.

"It shows the depth that we have on our team," goalie Drake Callender said.

Messi had a couple of chances Wednesday, and appeared to stop running somewhat abruptly after carrying the ball deep into the Toronto box in the 33rd minute. He was barely engaged after that, leaning forward at one point as if to stretch the back of his legs, then eventually took off his captain's armband — actually trying a long pass while holding the armband — before waiting for play to stop so he could depart.

Messi didn't even wait to come off the field before unlacing his cleats, lowering his socks and removing his shin guards. He placed the captain's band onto the arm of DeAndre Yedlin — who was Inter Miami's captain before Messi began his stint with the team in July — and now it's anyone's guess when Messi will

wear it again. The team would likely want him to play in the U.S. Open Cup final on Sept. 27.

Martino, per the team's translation, said Messi was removed from Wednesday's game "to be safe."

"We don't think it's a muscular injury. That's also from a conversation that I just had with him," Martino said via the translation, even though Messi was stretching in a manner that suggested otherwise before leaving the field. "But we have to continue being careful and we'll look at him the next few days."

Wednesday's match was the first of what will be six for Inter Miami in a span of 17 days. The team plays at Orlando on Sunday, then will host Houston in the U.S. Open Cup final on Sept. 27. That will be followed by three more MLS matches in short order: against New York City FC on Sept. 30, at Chicago on Oct. 4 and playing host to Cincinnati on Oct. 7.

Big questions remain as NHL training camps open

Associated Press

Exactly 100 days after the Vegas Golden Knights defeated the Florida Panthers to win the Stanley Cup for the first time, training camps opened around the NHL on Thursday.

The Golden Knights are bringing back nearly the same roster in their bid to repeat as champions while the Panthers are still licking their wounds after injuries piled up during their run to the final. There are also some big questions in Columbus as the Blue Jackets must now handle a last-minute coaching change.

The hot topics on and off the ice before the puck drops on the 2023-24 NHL season Oct. 10:

Is Vegas ready to repeat?

Fresh off helping lead Vegas to the Cup, Jack Eichel asked buddies who previously played long into June how they recovered for the following season.

"The message they relayed is, 'You'll be surprised by how good you feel come training camp, with having trained a little less and maybe spent a little less time in the gym,'" Eichel said. "Maybe more so now than past sum-

mers, it's about trying to get your body healthy and feeling good going into camp."

The Golden Knights should be feeling good about their continuity after keeping pending free agent goalie Adin Hill and forward Ivan Barbashev and losing only Reilly Smith by trade from the group that played the bulk of the playoffs.

According to FanDuel Sportsbook, the Colorado Avalanche are still the betting favorites at just under 9-1, followed by the Hurricanes at just under 10-1. The Golden Knights are sixth at 13-1.

How banged-up is Florida?

Matthew Tkachuk broke his sternum during the final, an injury he played through before missing Game 5. It took longer to rehab than expected, but the finalist for the Hart Trophy as league MVP and Panthers playoff leading scorer appears good to go.

"Feeling really good now," Tkachuk said. "Look at glass half full: I didn't miss 30 games or 20 games during the regular season. I had the summer to get it back and hopefully have a great start."

The rest of his team isn't so lucky. Both Aaron Ekblad and Brandon Montour had shoulder surgery and each defenseman could be out until at least mid-December.

What now for Columbus?

Nothing like a forced resignation of a polarizing, Stanley Cup-winning coach to shake things up for the Blue Jackets. Mike Babcock stepped down Sunday after asking to view photos on players' phones as part of a bonding effort led to an investigation by the NHLPA and Pascal Vincent being named his replacement.

It all happened over the past week or so, and ownership said there would be no changes to the front office led by president of hockey operations John Davidson and longtime general manager Jarmo Kekalainen at this time because "additional disruptions would be detrimental to our players and coaches as they prepare for the opening of training camp."

Vincent, who spent the past couple of seasons as an assistant under previous coach Brad Larsen, has a two-year contract and perhaps more respect from players.