

Ukrainian missile hits Russian fleet HQ

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine struck the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in a missile attack Friday that left a serviceman missing and the main building smoldering, according to military officials on both sides of the war and images from the scene in Crimea.

The Russian Defense Ministry initially said one servicemember was killed but then issued a statement saying he was missing following the attack in the port city of Sevastopol.

The Crimean Peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014, has been a frequent target since Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a full-scale invasion of Ukraine almost 19 months ago.

Crimea has served as the key hub supporting Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Sevastopol, the main base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet since the 19th century, has had a particular importance for navy operations since the start

of the invasion of Ukraine.

Ukraine has increasingly targeted naval facilities in Crimea in recent weeks while the brunt of its summer counteroffensive makes slow gains in the east and south of Ukraine, the Institute for the Study of War said Thursday in its daily assessment of the conflict. Military experts say it is essential for Ukraine to keep up its long-range attacks on Russian military assets in Crimea to degrade morale and weaken its enemy.

The attack came a day after Russia pounded cities across Ukraine with missiles and artillery strikes, killing at least five people as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with President Joe Biden and congressional leaders in Washington with an additional \$24 billion aid package under consideration. Zelenskyy was in Canada on Friday to address its Parliament in his ongoing effort to bolster support from Western allies.

The Russian-installed govern-

nor of Sevastopol, Mikhail Razvozhayev, said no one was injured Friday outside of the burning headquarters building, but he didn't provide information on other casualties. Firefighters battled the blaze, and more emergency forces were being brought in, an indication the fire could be massive.

The Ukrainian military claimed responsibility for the attack, which it claimed was a success.

"We promised that 'there will be more,'" Lt. Gen. Mykola Oleschuk, the air force commander, said in a social media post that thanked pilots and showed video of air sirens blazing and smoke rising from the building.

The Russian Defense Ministry said five missiles were shot down by Russian air defense systems responding to the attack on Sevastopol. It was not immediately clear if the headquarters was hit in a direct strike or by debris from an in-

tercepted missile.

Sevastopol residents said they heard explosions and saw smoke, Russian news outlets reported, and images showed gray plumes over the seafront. The Associated Press could not immediately verify the videos.

A stream of ambulances arrived at the fleet's headquarters, and shrapnel was scattered hundreds of yards around, Russian state news agency Tass reported.

Oleg Kryuchkov, an official with the Crimean administration, said one cruise missile downed near Bakhchysarai, about 20 miles inland, sparked a grass fire.

Razvozhayev said civilian infrastructure wasn't damaged but did not mention the impact on the fleet headquarters.

He initially warned Sevastopol residents that another attack was possible and urged them not to leave buildings or go to the city center. He later said there was no longer any threat.

House GOP charging toward a government shutdown

Bloomberg News

House Republicans are charging toward a U.S. government shutdown in less than 10 days as party lawmakers struggle to agree on how much to cut spending and how to explain their brinkmanship to the public.

The GOP's bitter divisions have made them unable to even formulate a concrete set of demands. That foreshadows an extended standoff with the White House and the Democratic-controlled Senate as the U.S. economy absorbs shocks from the shutdown, autowork-

ers strike and rising gasoline prices.

And the Republican Party's presidential front-runner and most prominent figure, Donald Trump, has further complicated the turmoil, presenting the clash as a way to halt criminal cases against himself and others who tried to overturn the 2020 election.

Republican infighting torpedoed plans for a Saturday House vote on a temporary spending bill crafted to meet conservatives' demands and serve as a starting point in negotiations with the Senate. On

Thursday, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy sent lawmakers home for a long weekend after two ultraconservatives ambushed him on a procedural vote.

President Joe Biden seized on the decision to forego weekend votes.

"Last time there was a government shutdown, 800,000 Americans were furloughed or worked without pay," Biden said on X, formerly known as Twitter. "But enjoy your weekend."

McCarthy's latest plan is for the House to vote next week on a

few spending bills that address conservative demands for deeper cuts, with the State and Agriculture Departments as potential targets. Those measures could then entice holdouts to eventually support a separate short-term funding bill.

"Hell no, they aren't going to become law," Representative Steve Womack of Arkansas, a McCarthy ally, said of those bills.

He added, however, that they might give House Republicans a stronger opportunity to have friendlier conversations on resolving differences.

Senate confirms nominees amid hold

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Senate voted Thursday to confirm the commandant of the Marine Corps and Army chief of staff, filling key positions on the Joint Chiefs of Staff as Sen. Tommy Tuberville maintains his hold on more than 300 other military nominees.

Marine Gen. Eric Smith was unanimously approved in a 96-0 vote. He also performed dual roles as assistant commandant of the Marine Corps and acting commandant following the retirement of Gen. David Berger in July.

Army Gen. Randy George was approved in a 96-1 vote, with Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, objecting. George had been simultaneously serving as vice chief of staff of the Army, a position that he has held since 2022, as well as the acting chief of staff since the August retirement of Gen. James McConville.

"I have full confidence that he will continue to modernize the Army and maintain our highly trained and lethal force to fight and win our nation's wars," said Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa. "Gen. George is a hardworking public servant who knows the needs of our soldiers and their families."

George and Smith had been prevented

from officially ascending to their services' top posts by Tuberville's monthslong objection to a routine Senate process for voting on general and flag officers in large batches.

Tuberville, R-Ala., said Wednesday that his hold will remain in place as long as the Pentagon continues to give time off and travel reimbursement to service members who need to cross state lines to obtain an abortion or other reproductive health services.

The seven-month standoff forced Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., on Wednesday to put the most pressing nominees up for individual floor votes, starting with Air Force Gen. C.Q. Brown. Brown was confirmed as the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Wednesday night in an 83-11 vote with just 10 days left before Army Gen. Mark Milley, the current chairman, retires.

Schumer reversed his opposition to confirming individual nominees after Tuberville made moves this week to force a floor vote on Smith. Democrats had argued it was up to Republicans to pressure Tuberville to drop his hold and said voting on top-level nominees individually, as Tuberville and other Republicans had demanded, would

politicize a typically uncontroversial process.

Tuberville voted against Brown's confirmation but supported the appointment of George and Smith.

"We are disturbed ... by Republicans' interest in voting exclusively on a few select officers while hundreds of other officers and their families are punished," said Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "Democrats pursued every opportunity we could before taking this route, and I hope Republicans understand the terrible message they are sending to the force."

It would take the Senate 103 days to confirm each of the 319 officers affected by Tuberville's hold, according to Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn.

Two additional picks for the Joint Chiefs are also caught up in the stalemate. Adm. Lisa Franchetti is nominated to become the first female chief of naval operations and the first woman on the Joint Chiefs, and Gen. David Allvin is awaiting confirmation as Air Force chief of staff. Franchetti has been serving in her nominated role in an acting capacity since August while also serving as vice chief of naval operations.

US commits \$325M in new military aid for Ukraine

By DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon will send new military aid to Ukraine worth as much as \$325 million — equipment that will mostly strengthen the country's air defenses against Russia, defense officials said Thursday.

The new round of military equipment and weapons includes AIM-9M Sidewinder missiles, more Avenger air-defense systems and more ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS. The tranche of aid also includes 155mm and 105mm artillery rounds, Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems and .50-caliber machine guns to use against

Russian drones.

The weapons, which are provided through the presidential drawdown authority, will be sent to Ukraine from Pentagon stocks. The presidential drawdown authority allows the Pentagon to send equipment to Ukraine on an emergency basis, so it arrives more quickly.

"This package includes additional capabilities to strengthen Ukraine's air defenses as it faces brutal aerial assaults from Russia," the Pentagon said.

The new U.S. aid came on the day Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited the Pentagon to meet with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Army Gen. Mark Milley, the outgoing chairman of the Joint Chiefs

of Staff. Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, the top Pentagon spokesman, said Austin provided an update during the meeting on "U.S. security assistance to meet Ukraine's most urgent battlefield needs."

"It was really an opportunity for [Austin] to provide President Zelenskyy with an update on the security assistance that we're providing. He reaffirmed that we will continue to work very hard with Ukraine ... to ensure they have what they need," Ryder said. "There was also an opportunity to discuss Ukraine's longer-term capability requirements and how to support them in the future."

Austin and Milley welcomed Zelenskyy to the Pentagon on

Thursday, and they attended a belated 9/11 ceremony honoring the people who died at the building on Sept. 11, 2001. The national anthems of the United States and Ukraine were played during the wreath-laying ceremony at the 9/11 memorial on the southwest corner of the building. Afterward, Zelenskyy briefly met with a few dozen Pentagon personnel before he left the premises to travel to the U.S. Capitol across the Potomac River.

"In a meeting with Austin, I thanked the U.S. for its crucial support," Zelenskyy said in a social media post. "We discussed deliveries of artillery systems and long-range capabilities, as well as strengthening air defense."

Menendez, wife indicted on bribery charges

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey and his wife have been indicted on charges of bribery.

Federal prosecutors on Friday announced the charges against the 69-year-old Democrat nearly six years after an earlier criminal case against him ended with a deadlocked jury. They said a search of Bob Menendez's home turned up \$100,000 in gold bars and \$480,000 in hidden cash.

The latest indictment is unrelated to the earlier charges that alleged Menendez accepted lavish gifts to pressure government officials on behalf of

a Florida doctor.

The Senate Historical Office says Menendez appears to be the first sitting senator in U.S. history to have been indicted on two unrelated criminal allegations.

A lawyer for Menendez's wife hasn't responded to a message seeking comment. Messages were left for Menendez's Senate spokesperson and his political consultant.

The first time Menendez was indicted, he had been accused of using his political influence to help a Florida eye doctor who had lavished him with gifts and campaign contributions.

The new charges follow a yearslong investigation that examined, among other things, the dealings of a New Jersey businessman — a friend of Menendez's wife — who secured sole authorization from the Egyptian government to certify that meat imported into that country meets Islamic dietary requirements. Investigators also asked questions about the Menendez family's interactions with a New Jersey developer.

Menendez faces re-election next year in a bid to extend his three-decade career in Washington, and as Democrats hold a narrow majority

in the Senate.

Menendez's political career had looked as though it might be over in 2015, when a federal grand jury in New Jersey indicted him on multiple charges over favors he did for a friend, Dr. Salomon Melgen.

Menendez was accused of pressuring government officials to resolve a Medicare billing dispute in Melgen's favor, securing visas for the doctor's girlfriends and helping protect a contract the doctor had to provide port-screening equipment to the Dominican Republic.

Menendez has always maintained his innocence.

Asylum-seekers adapt to US immigration changes

Associated Press

JACUMBA HOT SPRINGS, Calif. — A group of migrants from China surrendered to a Border Patrol agent in remote Southern California, joining others from Ecuador, Brazil, Colombia and elsewhere in a desert campsite with shelters made from tree branches.

Their arrival Wednesday was another sign that agents have become overwhelmed in recent days by asylum-seekers on parts of the U.S. border with Mexico. In tiny Eagle Pass, Texas, nearly 6,000 migrants crossed from Mexico into the

U.S. in two days, prompting authorities to close one of the town's two official border crossings so those agents could instead help with the influx. Border crossings have closed recently for similar reasons in San Diego and El Paso, Texas.

After a dip in illegal crossings that followed new asylum restrictions in May, President Joe Biden's administration is again on its heels. Democratic mayors and governors are seeking more relief for hosting asylum-seekers and Republicans are seizing on the issue ahead of 2024 elections.

The Homeland Security Department said Wednesday it would grant Temporary Protected Status to an estimated 472,000 Venezuelans who were in the U.S. on July 31, easing paths to work authorization. That's in addition to 242,700 Venezuelans who already had qualified for temporary status.

The administration is also sending 800 active-duty military troops to the border, adding to 2,500 National Guard members there. It's expanding border holding facilities by 3,250 people to nearly 23,000, and extending home surveil-

lance nationwide for families awaiting initial asylum screenings.

The administration renewed pressure — and blame — on Congress, which has long failed to agree on comprehensive changes to the nation's immigration system. The Biden administration is now asking Congress for \$4 billion in emergency funding.

Homeland Security said in a statement that it was "using the limited tools it has available to secure the border and build a safe, orderly, and humane immigration system."

Fentanyl found in day care center where toddler died

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The owners of a New York City day care center where a toddler died and three others were sickened by opioid exposure last week were hiding bags of fentanyl beneath a trap door in the children's play area, police said.

New York City detectives were executing a search warrant on the Bronx apartment

Thursday when they found the narcotics, including a large quantity of fentanyl, and other paraphernalia concealed by plywood and tile flooring. Photos shared by police show bags full of powder inside the "trap floor," a few steps away from a shelf of children's toys.

The grim discovery came nearly a week after four young children attending the day care

in the Bronx apartment were treated for opioid poisoning. One of the victims, 1-year-old Nicholas Dominici, is believed to have died from the exposure.

The day care center operator, Grei Mendez, and a tenant of the building, Carliso Acevedo Brito, were charged with murder of "depraved indifference" in Dominici's death. Authorities are still seeking a third individual,

Mendez's husband and a cousin to Brito.

Prior to finding drugs beneath the trap door, police had already announced the discovery of a kilogram of fentanyl that was stored near mats that children used for sleeping, along with multiple devices used by traffickers for mixing drugs and pressing it into bricks.

Strikes against automakers spread

Associated Press

The president of the United Auto Workers said Friday the union will expand its strike against major automakers by walking out of 38 General Motors and Stellantis facilities in 20 states.

The UAW on Friday targeted distribution centers, not production plants. The three strikes that began at plants Ford, GM and Stellantis plants one week ago will go on, the union said.

Ford was spared additional strikes because the company has met some of the union's demands during negotiations over

the past week, said UAW President Shawn Fain.

The union is pointing to the companies' huge recent profits as it seeks wage increases of 36% over four years. The companies have offered a little over half that amount. The UAW has other demands, including a 32-hour work week for 40 hours of pay and a restoration of traditional pension plans for newer workers.

The companies say they can't afford to meet the union's demands because they need to invest profits in a costly transition from gas-powered cars to electric vehicles.

The UAW's contract with the automakers expired at midnight on Sept. 14, and workers walked out of a Ford assembly plant near Detroit, a GM factory in Wentzville, Mo., and a Jeep plant run by Stellantis in Toledo, Ohio. The initial strike has involved about 13,000 of the union's 146,000 members.

Fain said earlier this week he would call on workers at more plants to strike unless there was significant progress in contract negotiations with the carmakers. Bargaining continued Thursday, although neither side reported any breakthroughs, and they remained

far apart on wage increases.

The strike until Friday had involved fewer than 13,000 of the union's 146,000 members. The companies have laid off a few thousand more, saying some factories are running short on parts because of the strike.

Still, the impact is not yet being felt on car lots around the country — it will probably take a few weeks before the strike causes a significant shortage of new vehicles, according to analysts. Prices could rise even sooner, however, if the prospect of a prolonged strike triggers panic buying.

VP Harris to lead office of gun violence prevention

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden has asked Vice President Kamala Harris to lead the first-ever federal office of gun violence prevention, which will seek to find ways around congressional inaction to stem rising violence.

Harris, a former prosecutor and state attorney general, has years of experience on the issue and was the natural fit to lead the effort, White House officials said. Adding the new office to her portfolio means Harris is tasked with some of the highest-profile domestic issues—including voting rights and abortion, as well as the increase in migration to the U.S. But they're also among the most fraught, difficult to solve and hard for Democrats to make headway on in Congress.

"Throughout her career, the vice president has worked tirelessly to protect people from gun violence," said Kristine Lucius, a domestic policy aide to Harris. "The vice president feels the urgency of this issue from every family she's grieved with and from students across the country

who are fighting for their right to be saved from gun violence."

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 Biden pushes for a ban on so-called "assault weapons" and works to mobilize voters critical to his reelection strategy — suburban women, voters of color and younger voters.

Overall, stricter gun laws are desired by a majority of Americans, regardless of what the current gun laws are in their state. That desire could be tied to some Americans' perceived impact of what fewer guns could mean for the country — namely, fewer mass shootings.

As of Wednesday, there have been at least 35 mass killings in the U.S. so far in 2023, leaving at least 171 people dead, not including shooters who died, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University.

Calif. eyes new rules for property insurance pricing

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California will let insurance companies consider climate change when setting their prices, the state's chief regulator announced Thursday, a move aimed at preventing insurers from fleeing the state over fears of massive losses from wildfires and other natural disasters.

Unlike other states, California does not let insurance companies consider current or future risks when deciding how much to charge for an insurance policy. Instead, they can only consider what's happened on a property in the past to set the price.

At a time when climate change is making wildfires, floods and windstorms more common, insurers say that restriction makes it difficult to truly price the risk on properties. It's one reason why, in the past year, seven of the top 12 insurance companies doing business in California have either paused or restricted new business in the state.

On Thursday, California Insurance Commissioner Ricardo

Lara said the state will write new rules to let insurers look to the future when setting their rates. But companies will only get to do this if they agree to write more policies for homeowners who live in areas with the most risk—including communities threatened by wildfires.

"Modernizing our insurance market is not going to be easy or happen overnight. We are in really uncharted territory and we must make difficult choices when the world is changing rapidly," Lara said at a news conference.

The rule change could mean higher rates for homeowners who are already seeing dramatic increases. Eight insurance companies doing business in California have requested rate increases of at least 20% or higher this year, according to the California Department of Insurance.

Harvey Rosenfield, founder of the advocacy group Consumer Watchdog, said Lara's announcement "will dramatically increase homeowner and renter insurance bills by hundreds or even thousands of dollars."

McCaffrey, 49ers defeat Giants 30-12

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — The New York Giants kept dialing up blitzes and the San Francisco 49ers just got the ball into their playmakers' hands.

Christian McCaffrey scored a touchdown in his 12th straight game, Deebo Samuel caught one of Brock Purdy's two TD passes and the San Francisco 49ers won their 13th straight regular season game, 30-12 over the New York Giants on Thursday night.

"They got a good bit of pressure on Brock and caused a couple of three-and-outs but it's about how long you can sustain doing that," Samuel said. "So in the second half we came out executing."

The Niners weren't particularly sharp on offense early in their home opener but got enough from McCaffrey and on big runs after the catch by Samuel and George Kittle to earn their second 3-0 start in 25 seasons.

The Giants blitzed Purdy on 33 of his 39 dropbacks, according to NFL NextGen stats, and he capitalized with 247 of his 310 yards passing on those plays, including the touchdowns to rookie Ronnie Bell and Samuel.

"I thought it was just a huge challenge, one of the bigger ones Brock has been in with a short week to prepare for a scheme like that," coach Kyle Shanahan said. "There's not a comfortable play throughout the game. ... I thought he settled down as the game went on."

McCaffrey ran for 85 yards, added 34 more receiving and scored on a 4-yard run that made it 17-3 late in the second quarter. That matched Jerry Rice's franchise record with 12 straight games in the regular season or playoffs with a TD and is three shy of the NFL mark.

The defense did the rest against the short-handed Giants (1-2), who fell behind by double

digits at the half for the third time in three games this season.

With the running game hampered by the absence of injured star Saquon Barkley and the offensive line overmatched without left tackle Andrew Thomas and left guard Ben Bredeson, the Giants struggled to move the ball and finished with 150 yards of offense.

"No excuses with anybody who missed the game or who played," coach Brian Daboll said.

They managed two field goals in the first half and scored on Matt Breida's 8-yard run on a third-quarter drive that needed just 15 yards thanks to two penalties on the Niners.

Daniel Jones was often on the run and couldn't get anything going downfield. He went 22 for 32 for 137 yards and an interception.

"We didn't create a rhythm," Jones said. "We didn't execute, didn't take advantage of our opportunities. That's a good de-

fense, a good team and when you are playing good teams you can't afford to do that. We didn't play well enough."

Purdy was off target in the first half, but his numbers were pretty good thanks to some fortunate bounces and help from his teammates. Kittle broke up a potential interception on the opening drive and Purdy had another pass to Samuel that got deflected and bounced high in the air before Bell caught it for a 15-yard gain.

Purdy also converted a third-and-15 and third-and-13 on the same drive by throwing quick passes behind the line of scrimmage that Samuel and McCaffrey turned into first downs.

The Giants once again found themselves in a big hole at halftime, trailing 17-6. It was an improvement from the first two weeks when they trailed Dallas 26-0 in the opener and Arizona 20-0 in Week 2. They rallied to beat the Cardinals with a strong second half.

Harbaugh will return to sidelines for No. 2 Michigan

Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Jim Harbaugh is back where he belongs — the Michigan sidelines.

Harbaugh missed the first three games of the season because of a school-imposed suspension but will be back Saturday against Rutgers — his 100th game at his alma mater.

The No. 2 Wolverines (3-0, 0-0 Big Ten) rolled without him, outscoring East Carolina, UNLV and Bowling Green by a combined score of 96-16, and he

made sure to credit everyone who played a part in keeping things running smoothly.

"A lot of people took the opportunity to step up and make this happen," he said Monday.

The worst part for Harbaugh was trying to figure out where to watch the games.

"I went to a place I've never been — not on the sidelines as a player or a coach," he said. "I was at a friend's house for the first game, then I was at my house, and last week I was trav-

eling and watched the game on a computer.

"I think seeing the games through a different lens has made me a better coach, and it has given me some ideas for new things to implement here."

The Wolverines have beaten Rutgers (3-0, 1-0) eight straight times and are heavy favorites to make it nine, but Harbaugh doesn't want anything about his suspension to be a distraction.

"We're going to keep chasing perfection," he said.

His players feel the same way.

"I'm fired up. It's going to mean something to have him back on the sideline," running back Blake Corum said.

Rutgers coach Greg Schiano knows that Michigan's talent is going to be a significant challenge, no matter who is coaching.

"Probably could be easily ranked No. 1, they are that good," he said. "There's absolutely no weaknesses in this team."

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Chubb injury highlights position's risk

Associated Press

Nick Chubb's injury underscores why running backs want better contracts and why NFL teams are reluctant to pay them.

Chubb's season ended abruptly when he suffered the devastating knee injury that was too gruesome for replay in Cleveland's loss to Pittsburgh on Monday night. The four-time Pro Bowl pick faces a long, arduous road to recovery with no guaranteed money coming his way beyond the \$10.85 million he's making this season.

Chubb will be attempting his second comeback from a significant injury to the same knee at age 28 with a non-guaranteed salary of \$12.2 million due in 2024. The Browns would assume a \$4 million dead cap hit if they release him next year, according to Spotrac.com.

Running backs have been arguing for bigger contracts and more guaranteed money in recent years because they're underpaid in comparison to their peers. Only kickers and punters had a lower franchise tag than running backs (\$10.1 million) in 2023. The franchise tag represents the average of the top five salaries at the player's position for the current year. It was \$32.4 million for quarterbacks, \$19.7 million for wide receivers and \$18.2 million for offensive linemen.

Five years ago, the franchise

tag for running backs was significantly higher at \$14.5 million. The devaluing of the position became a contentious issue for top running backs over the past offseason. Giants star Saquon Barkley and Raiders All-Pro Josh Jacobs refused to sign their franchise tags and were unhappy about not getting long-term contracts. Pro Bowl running back Tony Pollard signed his franchise tag with Dallas.

"Every player wants to have that longevity, that contract to ensure you're safe longevity-wise," Pollard said on the AP Pro Football Podcast. "But, it is what it is. We couldn't get a deal done within the deadline. So at this point, I'm just playing ball, going out there trying to win games."

Jonathan Taylor, a 2021 All-Pro, has been locked in a contract dispute with the Colts and was placed on the physically unable to perform list to start the season because he's recovering from offseason ankle surgery.

Many backs, including Chubb, voiced their concerns about the disparity in pay throughout the summer. The NFL Players Association agreed to the franchise tags in the collective bargaining agreement.

"Right now, there's really nothing we can do," Chubb said in July. "We're kind of handcuffed with the situation. We're

the only position that our production hurts us the most. If we go out there and run 2,000 yards with so many carries, the next year they're going to say, you're probably worn down. It's tough."

Last Monday, the NFL filed a grievance against the NFLPA, alleging that union leaders, including President JC Tretter, have advised running backs to "consider feigning or exaggerating injuries" to help increase their leverage in contract negotiations.

The grievance will be reviewed by an arbitrator.

Meanwhile, legitimate injuries are piling up for running backs.

JK Dobbins suffered a season-ending Achilles tendon injury in Week 1. Barkley was ruled out for New York's game against San Francisco on Thursday because of an ankle injury. Austin Ekeler and Aaron Jones missed games last week. David Montgomery and Jamaal Williams left their last game with injuries.

Injuries are part of the sport. They're common regardless of position. But running backs absorb more hits than anyone else on the field. They're tackled when they carry the ball or when they catch it. They have to block when they don't get the ball. The average career length for an NFL player is 3.3 years,

per Statista. It's 2.7 years for running backs.

Teams view running backs as interchangeable. Many clubs aren't willing to invest big money in running backs because late-round picks and undrafted free agents have had plenty of success. Only three Super Bowl champions in the past 15 years had a 1,000-yard rusher in the regular season compared with 11 in the 15 seasons before that.

When Chubb went down, Jerome Ford stepped in and ran for 106 yards on 16 carries. Ford, a fifth-round pick in 2022, got 69 of those yards on one run. The Browns also brought back Kareem Hunt to take Chubb's roster spot.

Filling Chubb's shoes won't be easy, however. Chubb, a second-team All-Pro last season, has averaged 5.3 yards per carry over his six-year career. That's the second-highest in NFL history among running backs with at least 1,000 carries.

"You don't replace Nick Chubb. You just don't do that," Browns coach Kevin Stefanski said. "Great players in the league, you look around, they go out. It's always not one person that replaces a player of his caliber. So everybody's got to do a little bit more, a little bit more everywhere."

Do more for less. That's been life for running backs in the NFL.

Cowboys star CB Trevon Diggs tears ACL in practice

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Dallas Cowboys cornerback Trevon Diggs tore the ACL in his left knee in practice Thursday, a major setback for a defense off to a great start in 2023.

The team said an MRI confirmed the ACL tear and that while there was no timetable for a return, the 2021 All-Pro was expected to miss the rest of the

season.

Diggs was seen leaving the team's headquarters on crutches. He had his first interception of the season in last week's 30-10 victory over the New York Jets.

Diggs is tied for the NFL lead with 18 interceptions since entering the league in 2020.

It's quite a blow for a defense that has had 10 sacks and seven takeaways without a turnover

by the Dallas offense. The plus-seven turnover margin led the NFL through two games.

Dallas (2-0), which visits Arizona (0-2) on Sunday, is just the fifth team in the Super Bowl era to score at least 70 points and allow 10 or fewer in the first two games. The Cowboys beat both New York teams by a combined 70-10.

"Saw that I guess a couple of

you saw out there on the field," quarterback Dak Prescott said after practice, not wanting to speculate on the severity of the injury. "Prayers, hoping for the best, simple as that."

Diggs signed a \$97 million, five-year contract extension at the start of training camp. The Cowboys drafted the former Alabama player in the second round in 2020.

Brewers move closer to NL Central title

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Victor Caratini hit a three-run homer and Blake Perkins added a solo shot, leading the Milwaukee Brewers to a 6-0 victory over the St. Louis Cardinals on Thursday in the final game of a four-game series.

The Brewers' magic number to clinch their second National League Central title in three years fell to two with nine games to play.

Milwaukee (87-66) could wrap up the division title as soon as Friday in Miami with another victory and a loss by the Chicago Cubs. The number to just clinch a postseason berth is two over the Marlins.

The Brewers have won eight of their past 11 and 22 of their past 31 games.

St. Louis (67-86) fell to 20 games behind first-place Milwaukee in enduring its first losing season since 2007. The Cardinals, now shut out 12 times this season, have lost seven of their past 11 games.

Rays 5, Angels 4: Manuel Margot flared a run-scoring single to right field to complete a two-run rally in the bottom of the ninth inning and playoff-bound Tampa Bay beat visiting Los Angeles.

Tampa Bay, which holds the top AL wild card, is 1½ games behind AL East-leading Baltimore, which holds the tiebreaker.

Pinch-hitter Harold Ramírez and Yandy Díaz started the ninth with singles off Angels closer Carlos Estévez (5-5). Ramírez went to third on Curtis Mead's fly ball and scored to tie it at 4 on Isaac Paredes RBI single.

After Randy Arozarena struck out and Josh Lowe walked to load the bases, Margot delivered his opposite-field game-winning hit that handed Estévez his fourth blown save in 34 chances.

Braves 10, Nationals 3: Ronald Acuña Jr. scored his 140th run of 2023 — the most in the majors in 16 years — after tripling,

Matt Olson hit his 53rd homer and Ozzie Albies went deep for one of his four hits, lifting NL East champion Atlanta past last-place Washington.

The Braves out-hit the Nationals 18-8, and every member of Atlanta's daunting starting lineup reached base at least once. Olson raised his RBI total to 132, equaling Gary Sheffield in 2003 for the most by a Braves player since the club moved to Atlanta. Albies went 4 for 6, including his 32nd homer, with four RBIs to top 100 in a season for the second time in his career.

Austin Riley, Michael Harris II and Orlando Arcia each collected three hits.

Max Fried (8-1), who got extra rest between starts to avoid developing a finger blister, allowed one run — on Alex Call's homer in the third — and three hits in six innings while striking out seven. He lowered his ERA to 2.55.

Yankees 5, Blue Jays 3: Gerrit Cole retired the first 16 hitters and pitched eight outstanding innings to strengthen his Cy Young Award credentials as host New York moved back over .500 with a victory over Toronto.

Cole (14-4) allowed a run and two hits in his longest outing since pitching a two-hit shutout against Minnesota on April 16. He struck out nine, walked none and permitted two baserunners while lowering his AL-best ERA to 2.75.

Jake Bauers hit a three-run homer four batters in against Jose Berríos (11-11), Aaron Judge and Estevan Florial added RBI doubles and the Yankees avoided a three-game sweep.

Guardians 5, Orioles 2: Ramón Laureano drew a bases-loaded walk off Jacob Webb for the go-ahead run in the eighth inning, sending Cleveland past AL East-leading Baltimore.

The Guardians scored three times in the bottom of the eighth — all charged to Cionel Pérez (4-2) — immediately after the Orioles tied the game with two in

the top half. Bo Naylor's run-scoring single and Gabriel Arias' RBI grounder followed Laureano's walk that plated Josh Naylor.

Baltimore, which is headed to the postseason for the first time since 2016, holds a 1½-game lead over Tampa Bay in the division and for the best record in the AL. The Rays beat the Angels 5-4 earlier in the day.

Trevor Stephan (7-7) gave up two runs in one inning and Emmanuel Clase picked up his major league-best 42nd save in 53 opportunities for Cleveland, which has eight games remaining and trails first-place Minnesota by 8½ games in the AL Central.

Pirates 8, Cubs 6: Miguel Andújar had three hits and drove in three runs, Joshua Palacios hit a pinch-hit three-run homer in the ninth inning, and visiting Pittsburgh held off a late rally by slumping Chicago.

The loss was the 10th in the last 13 games for the Cubs, who fell into a tie with Miami for the final NL wild-card spot.

Pittsburgh's Johan Oviedo (9-14) threw six scoreless innings, giving up four hits. The right-hander walked five but escaped trouble on multiple occasions and held the Cubs hitless in eight at-bats with runners in scoring position.

Connor Joe and Ji Hwan Bae each drove in a run for the Pirates, whose bullpen surrendered six runs in the last three innings.

Phillies 5, Mets 4: Nick Castellanos homered and drove in four runs to reach a career-best 103 RBIs in a season, and host Philadelphia maintained its hold on the top NL wild-card spot by beating New York.

Alec Bohm also went deep and Bryce Harper added a pair of hits for the defending NL champion Phillies, who opened a seven-game homestand with their fifth win in their last seven games. Philadelphia (84-69) is 3 games ahead of Arizona for the

first NL wild card.

Mark Vientos homered, and Jeff McNeil singled, doubled, tripled and drove in a run for the Mets.

Castellanos hit a 92 mph fastball from Jeff Bringham (1-3) 454 feet off the facing of the second deck in left field in the sixth inning to put Philadelphia in front 5-4.

Dodgers 7, Giants 2: J.D. Martinez's sacrifice fly drove in the go-ahead run in the sixth inning and host Los Angeles capitalized on two physical and one mental blunders by San Francisco in the series opener.

The Giants have dropped six of seven on their road trip to fall further out of the NL wild-card race.

Will Smith tripled off John Brebbia (3-1) and Martinez followed with the sac fly to right. Mike Yastrzemski wasn't that deep when he caught the ball flat-footed and then held it for a moment, apparently forgetting there were only two outs.

That gave Smith time enough to charge home for a 3-2 lead.

Two wild pitches by reliever Luke Jackson led to two runs for the NL West champion Dodgers in the seventh.

Tigers 7, Athletics 3: Tarik Skubal had a season-high 10 strikeouts in seven strong innings for his fourth consecutive win, and Detroit handed Oakland its eighth consecutive loss.

Kerry Carpenter had his ninth multi-hit game this month and the 34th of the season for Detroit. Matt Vierling added two hits, an RBI and scored twice for the Tigers.

Brent Rooker hit his 28th home run for the last-place A's (46-107), who need to win their final nine games to avoid matching the 1979 A's (54-108) for the most losses in Oakland history.

Skubal (7-3), who was born in Hayward 20 minutes south of Oakland, had another strong outing for Detroit while pitching in front of a small crowd of 6,160 at the Coliseum.

MLB has late-season drama in NL, AL

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Ten days remain in MLB's regular season, and the playoff races are hot, particularly in a crowded National League.

The NL wild-card race has been tight for the better part of a month, with the Phillies, Diamondbacks, Cubs, Marlins, Reds and Giants scrambling to claim three playoff positions. It's exactly the kind of drama MLB hoped for when it expanded the playoff field from 10 to 12 teams before the 2022 season. The American League race also has some drama with the Rangers, Astros, Blue Jays and Mariners fighting for three playoff spots.

Rookie sensation Corbin Carroll was all smiles Wednesday, a few minutes after stealing his 50th base of the season, cracking his 25th homer and leading the streaking Arizona Diamondbacks to their fifth straight win.

If the 22-year-old is fazed by September playoff-chase baseball, he certainly hasn't shown it.

"This is the fun part," Carroll said.

Of course, that depends on which way you're trending.

For every team rising this

time of the year, there's almost always another team going in the opposite direction. During their five-game winning streak, the D-backs took three straight from the Chicago Cubs and two more from the San Francisco Giants, two teams backsliding in the NL wild-card picture.

The Giants fell to 76-76 after Wednesday's games and need a minor miracle to get into the postseason.

"These were must-win games and, going back several games, those were also must-win games," Giants manager Gabe Kapler said. "Now, the math is not on our side. Every game is one we have to win."

Here are some of the other storylines as the long 162-game regular season reaches its end.

AL West scramble

The American League playoff race isn't quite as crowded, but it's still a good one.

The Houston Astros, Texas Rangers and surprising Seattle Mariners are in a close fight for the AL West — the three teams were separated by just a half-game in the standings after Wednesday. Simultaneously, all three are contending with the Toronto Blue Jays for a potential AL wild-card spot.

When the dust finally settles, three of the four teams will be in the playoffs. One will not.

"It's just fun to be playing meaningful games," Blue Jays pitcher Kevin Gausman said on Wednesday. "Every game matters right now and every win is one step closer to our goal."

NL awards

The NL MVP race continues to be an epic showdown between Ronald Acuña and Mookie Betts.

The two have remarkably similar numbers in many respects: Acuña was batting .337 with 39 homers and 100 RBIs while Betts has a .310 batting average, 39 homers and 103 RBIs. Acuña's prowess on the basepaths could push him over the top.

The Braves speedster leads all of baseball with 67 stolen bases.

Betts has done all of his hitting while providing defensive help in right field, second base and even shortstop.

The two have been so good that poor Matt Olson — who has slugged 52 homers in the middle of the Braves order — probably doesn't have a chance, but he's having a career year nonetheless.

The NL Cy Young race is also close, though San Diego's Blake Snell made a statement with seven hitless innings against the Rockies earlier this week.

Snell appears to be the favorite, but Arizona's Zac Gallen, Atlanta's Spencer Strider and Chicago's Justin Steele are among those who could make a case in their final start or two.

Rodriguez push?

Shohei Ohtani is likely a lock for the AL MVP after arguably the best five-month stretch in MLB history.

But Seattle's Julio Rodríguez has at least entered the periphery of the race after a mammoth second half.

The 22-year-old, two-time All-Star, hit .429 with a 1.197 OPS in August, almost single-handedly willing the Mariners into the playoff race. He's cooled off slightly in September, but has still hit 10 homers over the past 30 days.

The Mariners have been one of the best stories in the sport over the past few months. They were sellers at the Aug. 1 trade deadline — sending star closer Paul Sewald to the Diamondbacks — but defied expectations with a great run of baseball over the next 1½ months.

Black swimming coach to head US team at Olympics

Associated Press

Anthony Nesty made more history Thursday when he was picked to lead the U.S. men's swimming team in Paris, where he will become the first Black head coach for the powerhouse American squad at the Olympics.

Nesty's selection was announced by USA Swimming, which also appointed Todd DeSorbo to head the women's squad next summer.

Nesty, the University of Florida coach, works with top American swimmers such as Katie Le-

decky, Caeleb Dressel and Bobby Finke.

"I'm excited to be the men's head Olympic coach in Paris," Nesty said in a statement released by USA Swimming. "Todd and I look forward to coaching these athletes to the best of their abilities in Paris next summer."

Competing for Suriname, Nesty was the first Black male swimmer to win an Olympic gold medal when he upset Matt Biondi at the 1988 Seoul Games. In 2022, Nesty became the first Black coach to lead a U.S. team at the

world championships.

Nesty and DeSorbo, who coaches at the University of Virginia, will be reprising their roles from the Budapest worlds, where Nesty led the men's team and DeSorbo headed the women's group.

"I am thrilled coaches DeSorbo and Nesty will be joining us in Paris and am looking forward to the experience and leadership they will bring to the games," said Lindsay Mintenko, managing director of the U.S. national team.

Nesty and DeSorbo served as assistant coaches with the U.S. team at the Tokyo Olympics, where the Americans won a total of 30 medals. Nesty's swimmers included Finke, who captured a pair of golds, and Kieran Smith, who earned a bronze.

Since then, Dressel and Ledecky have joined his Gainesville, Fla.-based pro training group.

In Budapest, the Americans captured 45 medals in the pool, surpassing the previous record of 38 by an individual country.