

## US mulls Kyiv's long-range weapon plan

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration still is not convinced that it should give Ukraine the authority to launch long-range missiles deeper into Russia, and U.S. officials say they are seeking more detailed information about how Kyiv would use the weapons and how they fit into the broader strategy for the war.

U.S. officials said they have asked Ukraine to spell out more clearly its combat objectives, as President Joe Biden prepares to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy next week.

Administration officials are concerned that loosening restrictions on the use of the weapons would have limited impact and come with great risk. Russian President Vladimir Putin last week warned that Russia would be “at war” with the United States

and its NATO allies if they allow Ukraine to use the long-range weapons.

U.S. defense officials have repeatedly argued that the long-range missiles are limited in number and that Ukraine already is using its own long-range drones to hit targets farther into Russia. That capability was evidenced by a Ukrainian drone strike overnight that hit a large military depot, causing a huge blaze, in a town 300 miles from the border.

Ukrainian leaders, however, say they need permission to strike weapons depots, airfields and military bases far from the border to motivate Russia to seek peace. The U.S. allows Ukraine to use American-provided weapons in more limited, cross-border strikes to counter attacks by Russian forces.

The U.S. is coming under mounting pressure from NATO allies who believe Ukraine should be the one to decide how and where it uses the weapons and how it fights its own war. A senior U.S. official said the subject came up during meetings of NATO defense chiefs in Europe over the weekend — attended by Air Force Gen. CQ Brown, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff — and that most advocated in favor of the change.

The U.S. officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

Ukraine is pressing to use U.S.-supplied Army Tactical Missile Systems, or ATACMS, and British-supplied Storm Shadow missiles to hit deeper into Russia. Biden discussed the issue during a meeting last week with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

U.S. officials familiar with discussions said they believed Starmer was seeking Biden's approval to allow Ukraine to use the Storm Shadow missiles for expanded strikes in Russia. Biden's approval may be needed because Storm Shadow components are made in the U.S. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to share the status of private conversations.

Starmer said talks would continue when global leaders convene for the U.N. General Assembly gathering next week. Biden's meeting with Zelenskyy is expected to happen late next week after the U.S. president returns from the U.N.

A senior U.S. official said the U.S. wants to help Ukraine shape its combat objectives for the war and the use of long-range weapons.

## Hezbollah leader: Pager attack has crossed 'red line'

*Associated Press*

BEIRUT — The leader of Hezbollah vowed to keep up daily strikes on Israel despite this week's mass bombing attack on its communication devices, and said Israelis displaced by the fighting from homes near the Lebanon border would not be able to return until the war in Gaza ends.

Hezbollah and Israel launched fresh attacks across the border as Hassan Nasrallah spoke for the first time since the deadly device bombings he described as a “severe blow” — and for which he promised to retaliate.

The two-days of attacks targeting thousands of Hezbollah pagers and walkie-talkies have been widely blamed on Israel, heightening fears that 11 months

of near-daily exchanges of fire between Hezbollah and Israel will escalate into all-out war.

During the speech, Hezbollah struck at least four times in northern Israel, and two Israeli soldiers were killed in a strike earlier on Thursday. Israeli warplanes flew low over Beirut while Nasrallah spoke and broke the sound barrier, scattering birds and prompting people in houses and offices to quickly open windows to prevent them from shattering.

Israel also launched attacks in southern Lebanon on Thursday, though it was not immediately clear if there were any casualties.

In recent weeks, Israeli leaders have stepped-up warnings of a potential larger military operation against Hezbollah, saying

they are determined to stop the group's fire to allow tens of thousands of Israelis to return to homes near the border.

In a Thursday briefing, the Israeli defense minister said Hezbollah would “pay an increasing price” as Israel seeks to make conditions near its border with Lebanon safe enough for residents displaced by the fighting to return.

“The sequence of our military actions will continue,” he said.

The attack using electronic devices appeared to be the culmination of a monthslong operation by Israel to target as many Hezbollah members as possible all at once — but civilians were also hit. At least 37 people were killed, including two children, and some 3,000 wounded in the explosions Tuesday and

Wednesday.

Nasrallah said the group is investigating how the bombings were carried out.

“Yes, we were subjected to a huge and severe blow,” he said. “The enemy crossed all boundaries and red lines,” he said. Pointing to the number of pagers and walkie-talkies, he accused Israel of intending to kill thousands of people at one time. “The enemy will face a severe and fair punishment from where they expect and don't expect.”

He said Hezbollah will continue its barrages into northern Israel as long as the war in Gaza continues, vowing that Israel will not be able to bring its people back to the border region. “The only way is stop the aggression on the people of Gaza and the West Bank,” he said.

# North Korea: New missile can carry 'large warhead'

BY DAVID CHOI  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea's most recent show of force was the successful testing of "highly upgraded" short-range ballistic and strategic cruise missiles, the communist regime announced Thursday.

Wednesday's launches were overseen by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who "expressed great satisfaction" with the Hwasongpho-11-Da ballistic missile capable of carrying a 4.5-ton warhead, according to a state-run Korean Central News Agency report the next day.

The weapon can strike targets up to 200 miles away and boasts the explosive power of a "super-large warhead," the report said.

Kim also oversaw the test of a

"highly upgraded" cruise missile, KCNA reported without providing further details.

Wednesday's missiles were launched at 6:50 a.m. from South Pyongan province and flew northeast approximately 250 miles, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said to reporters that morning.

The missiles were assessed to have landed near North Korea's eastern coast and did not fall within Tokyo's maritime exclusive economic zone, Japan's Ministry of Defense said in a news release.

Images released by KCNA on Thursday show a missile in flight and an explosion on land, rather than splashing into the sea.

North Korea unveiled the initial Hwasongpho-11 missile at a military parade in 2018. It has

since undergone design changes, including a nearly 5-foot length extension and a warhead weight of an additional 2 tons, according to Yang Uk, a research fellow at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul.

There do not appear to be significant changes to the weapon's design since a previous launch on July 1, he told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday.

North Korea fired two missiles that day, including a Hwasongpho-11 that flew roughly 370 miles northeast from Hwanghae province, about 65 miles southwest of Pyongyang, according to the South's military.

The other missile flew eastward approximately 75 miles before the South's military lost track of the projectile, due to its abnormal flight pattern.

## USS San Diego arrives at new home in Japan

BY JONATHAN SNYDER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The amphibious transport dock USS San Diego has arrived at its new homeport in Japan, replacing the USS Green Bay, which had been stationed at Sasebo Naval Base for nearly a decade.

The San Diego steamed away from its namesake city on Aug. 14 and on Thursday arrived at the base in Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, U.S. 7th Fleet said in a press release that afternoon.

The San Diego joins the America Amphibious Ready Group, led by the amphibious assault ship USS America, and teams with the Okinawa-based 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit.

"The crew is enthusiastic about starting our next chapter with the USS San Diego in Japan," Capt. David Walton, the ship's skipper, said in the release. "After over a month of transiting across the Pacific Ocean, and many more months of preparation and training, this is the moment we have all been focused on."

The ship, which had been homeported at Naval Base San Diego for 12 years, will support a variety of missions, Task Force 76 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. John Mike said last month. These include transporting personnel, equipment and vehicles that would be used as part of a landing force, and aircraft like the MV-22 Osprey tiltrotor or Navy and Marine Corps helicopters.

"We are grateful for the support we received entering into 7th Fleet, and we are ready to immediately fold into forward deployed operations," Walton said.

## Submarine crew, undersea warfare staff receive US Navy's Arctic Service Medals

BY GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The crew of the USS Indiana, a Virginia-class, fast-attack submarine that spent three weeks in the seas near the North Pole during Operation Ice Camp 2024, were awarded the Navy's Arctic Service Medal on Tuesday.

Adm. Lisa Franchetti, chief of naval operations, presented the medals to officers and sailors during a ceremony at Naval Submarine Base New London, Conn.

The Arctic Service Medal is awarded to Navy and Marine

personnel who show "excellence and significant contributions to national security and maritime superiority in the Arctic region," according to a Navy statement.

"Your three-week operation during Ice Camp advanced the lethality of our submarine force and showcased to the world that our Navy can operate anywhere and anytime — in any maritime environment," Franchetti said at the ceremony.

Cmdr. Kyle McVay, commanding officer of the USS Indiana, said the award was due to the accomplishments of the

crew.

"Receiving the Arctic Service Medal is a testament to the hard work and dedication of every sailor onboard," he said.

The annual Operation Ice Camp exercise is held to advance military capabilities in the Arctic. The activity includes a submarine rapidly surfacing through the ice so the ship's tower is above the surface.

Personnel then set up exterior command posts and other operations on the floe.

The Navy first held Operation Ice Camp in 1946 as Ice Exercise.

# Teamsters declines to endorse for president

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The International Brotherhood of Teamsters declined Wednesday to endorse Kamala Harris or Donald Trump for president, saying neither candidate had sufficient support from the 1.3 million-member union.

“Unfortunately, neither major candidate was able to make serious commitments to our union to ensure the interests of working people are always put before Big Business,” Teamsters President Sean M. O’Brien said in a statement. “We sought commitments from both Trump and Harris not to interfere in critical union campaigns or core Teamsters industries — and to honor our members’ right to strike — but were unable to secure those pledges.”

The Teamsters’ rebuff reflected a labor union torn over issues of political identity and policy, one that mirrors a broader national divide. Vice President Harris has unmistakably backed organized labor, while former President Trump has appealed to

many white blue-collar workers even as he has openly scorned unions at times. By not endorsing anyone, the Teamsters are essentially ceding some influence in November’s election as both candidates claimed to have support from its members.

Harris campaign spokesperson Lauren Hitt noted in an emailed statement that more than three dozen retired Teamsters spoke last month in Chicago at the Democratic National Convention, having endorsed Harris. Their pensions were saved through the 2021 passage of the Butch Lewis Act that President Joe Biden and Harris championed.

“While Donald Trump says striking workers should be fired, Vice President Harris has literally walked the picket line and stood strong with organized labor for her entire career,” Hitt said. “The Vice President’s strong union record is why Teamsters locals across the country have already endorsed her — alongside the overwhelming majority of orga-

nized labor.”

The Teamsters said Wednesday that internal polling of members showed Trump with an advantage over Harris, a fact that the Republican’s campaign immediately seized upon by sending out an email that said the “rank-and-file of the Teamsters Union supports Donald Trump for President.”

Trump called the Teamsters’ decision not to endorse “a great honor.”

“It’s a great honor,” he said. “They’re not going to endorse the Democrats. That’s a big thing.”

Harris met Monday with a panel of Teamsters, having long courted organized labor and made support for the middle class her central policy goal. Trump also met with a panel of Teamsters in January and even invited O’Brien to speak at the Republican National Convention, where the union leader railed against corporate greed.

In an interview Wednesday on Fox News, O’Brien said lack of an endorsement tells candidates

that they have to back the Teamsters in the future. “This should be an eye opener for 2028,” he said. “If people want the support of the most powerful union in North America, whether you’re a Democrat or Republican, start doing some things to support our members,” he said.

The Teamsters’ choice to not endorse came just weeks ahead of the Nov. 5 election, far later than endorsements by other large unions such as the AFL-CIO, the American Federation of Teachers and the United Auto Workers that have chosen to devote resources to getting out the vote for Harris.

Marick Masters, a business professor emeritus at Wayne State University in Detroit who follows labor issues, said the Teamsters lack of an endorsement suggests a realignment within the union’s membership.

For many workers, issues such as gun control, abortion and border security override Trump’s expressions of hostility to unions, Masters said.

## FBI: Iran failed to interest Dems in stolen Trump info

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Iranian hackers sought to interest President Joe Biden’s campaign in information stolen from rival Donald Trump’s campaign, sending unsolicited emails to people associated with the then-Democratic candidate in an effort to interfere in the 2024 election, the FBI and other federal agencies said Wednesday.

There’s no indication that any recipients responded, officials said, and several media organizations who have said they also were approached with stolen material did not publish it. Kamala Harris’ presidential campaign called the emails from Iran “unwelcome and unacceptable malicious activity” that were received by only a few people who regarded them as spam or phishing attempts.

The emails were received before the hack of the Trump campaign was publicly acknowledged, and there’s no evidence the recipients of the emails knew their origin.

The announcement is the latest U.S. government effort to call out what officials say is Iran’s brazen, ongoing work to interfere in the election, including a hack-and-leak campaign that the FBI and other federal agencies linked last month to Tehran. U.S. officials in recent months have used criminal charges, sanctions and public advisories to detail actions taken by foreign adversaries to influence the election, including an indictment targeting a covert Russian effort to spread pro-Russia content to U.S. audiences.

In this case, the hackers sent emails in late June and early July

to people who were associated with Biden’s campaign before he dropped out. The emails “contained an excerpt taken from stolen, non-public material from former President Trump’s campaign as text in the emails,” according to a statement released by the FBI, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

The FBI informed Trump aides within the last 48 hours that information hacked by Iran had been sent to the Biden campaign, according to a senior campaign official granted anonymity to speak because of the sensitive nature of the investigation.

The Trump campaign disclosed on Aug. 10 that it had been hacked and said Iranian actors had stolen and distributed sensi-

tive internal documents. At least three news outlets — Politico, The New York Times and The Washington Post — were leaked confidential material from inside the Trump campaign. So far, each has refused to reveal any details about what it received.

Politico reported that it began receiving emails on July 22. The source passed along what appeared to be a research dossier that the campaign had apparently done on the Republican vice presidential nominee, Ohio Sen. JD Vance.

In a statement, Harris campaign spokesperson Morgan Finckelstein said the campaign has cooperated with law enforcement since learning that people associated with Biden’s team were among the recipients of the emails.

# House rejects temporary funding measure

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House on Wednesday rejected Speaker Mike Johnson's proposal that would have linked temporary funding for the federal government with a mandate that states require proof of citizenship when people register to vote.

Next steps on government funding are uncertain. Lawmakers are not close to completing work on the dozen annual appropriations bills that will fund federal agencies during the next fiscal year, so they'll need to approve a stopgap measure to prevent a partial shutdown when the budget year begins Oct. 1.

The vote was 220-202, with 14

Republicans and all but three Democrats opposing the bill. Johnson, who said after the vote he was "disappointed," will likely pursue a Plan B to avoid a partial shutdown, though he was not yet ready to share details.

"We'll draw up another play and we'll come up with a solution," Johnson said. "I'm already talking to colleagues about their many ideas. We have time to fix the situation and we'll get right to it."

Johnson had pulled the bill from consideration last week because it lacked the votes to pass. He worked through the weekend to win support from fellow Republicans but was unable to overcome objections

about spending levels from some members, while others said they don't favor any continuing resolutions, insisting that Congress return to passing the dozen annual appropriations bills on time and one at a time. Democrats overwhelmingly opposed the measure.

Requiring new voters to provide proof of citizenship has become a leading election-year priority for Republicans raising the specter of noncitizens voting in the U.S., even though it's already illegal to do so and research has shown that such voting is rare.

Opponents say that such a requirement would disenfranchise millions of Americans who do not have a birth certifi-

cate or passport readily available when they get a chance to register at their school, church or other venues when voter registration drives occur.

But Johnson said it is a serious problem because even if a tiny percentage of noncitizens do vote, it could determine the outcome of an extremely close race.

He noted that Republican Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks of Iowa won her seat back in 2020 by six votes.

"It's very, very serious stuff and that's why we're going to do the right thing," Johnson said before the vote. "We're going to responsibly fund the government and we're going to stop noncitizens voting in elections."

## Fed signals end to inflation fight with a half-point cut

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve on Wednesday cut its benchmark interest rate by an unusually large half-point, a dramatic shift after over two years of high rates that helped tame inflation but also made borrowing painfully expensive for American consumers.

The rate cut, the Fed's first in more than four years, reflects its new focus on bolstering the job market, which has shown clear signs of slowing. Coming just weeks before the presidential election, the Fed's move also has the potential to scramble the economic landscape just as Americans prepare to vote.

The central bank's action lowered its key rate to roughly 4.8%, down from a two-decade high of 5.3%, where it had stood for 14 months as it struggled to curb the worst inflation streak in four decades. Inflation has tumbled from a peak of 9.1% in mid-2022 to a three-year low of 2.5% in August, not far above the Fed's 2% target.

The Fed's policymakers also signaled that they expect to cut their key rate by an additional half-point in their final two meetings this year, in November and December. And they envision four more rate cuts in 2025 and two in 2026.

In a statement and in a news conference with Chair Jerome Powell, the Fed came closer than it has before to declaring victory over inflation.

"We know it is time to recalibrate our (interest rate) policy to something that's more appropriate given the progress on inflation," Powell said. "We're not saying, 'mission accomplished' ... but I have to say, though, we're encouraged by the progress that we have made."

"The U.S. economy is in a good place," he added, "and our decision today is designed to keep it there."

In an updated set of projections, the policymakers collectively envision a faster drop in inflation than they did three months ago.

## Veteran CIA officer gets 30 years for sex assaults

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A longtime CIA officer who drugged, photographed and sexually assaulted more than two dozen women in postings around the world was sentenced to 30 years in federal prison Wednesday after an emotional hearing in which victims described being deceived by a man who appeared kind, educated and part of an agency "that is supposed to protect the world from evil."

Brian Jeffrey Raymond, with a graying beard and orange prison jumpsuit, sat dejectedly as he heard his punishment for one of the most egregious misconduct cases in the CIA's history. It was chronicled in his own library of more than 500 images that showed him in some cases straddling and groping his nude, unconscious victims.

"It's safe to say he's a sexual predator," U.S. Senior Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly said in imposing the full sentence prosecutors had requested. "You are going to have a period of time to

think about this."

Prosecutors say the 48-year-old Raymond's assaults date to 2006 and tracked his career in Mexico, Peru and other countries, all following a pattern.

He would lure women he met on Tinder and other dating apps to his government-leased apartment and drug them while serving wine and snacks. Once they were unconscious, he spent hours posing their naked bodies before photographing and assaulting them.

Raymond's sentencing comes amid a reckoning on sexual misconduct at the CIA. The Associated Press reported last week that another veteran CIA officer faces state charges in Virginia for allegedly reaching up a co-worker's skirt and forcibly kissing her during a drunken party in the office.

Still another former CIA employee is scheduled to face a jury trial next month on charges he assaulted a woman with a scarf at the agency's Langley, Va., headquarters.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Sheriff: 6-year-old had gun at school in bookbag**

**VA** ORANGE — A 6-year-old student brought a revolver to a Virginia elementary school in their bookbag, but the sheriff said there's no sign that the child intended to use it.

An instructional assistant at Orange Elementary School found the gun on Monday afternoon while helping a child who arrived late take items out of their bookbag, Orange County Sheriff Jason C. Smith said in a statement posted on social media. The assistant notified administration and the school resource officer and the gun was removed from the school, Smith said.

It was determined that the 6-year-old brought the loaded Heritage Rough Rider single-action, .22-caliber "Cowboy style" revolver to school, but there's no indication that the child intended to use the firearm, he said. No arrests have been announced in the case and Smith said the investigation was ongoing.

**Small plane lands safely with one wheel deployed**

**MA** BOSTON — A small airplane landed safely at Logan International Airport in Boston on Tuesday afternoon despite having just one of its landing wheels deployed.

The Cape Air Cessna 402 had two passengers and one crew member. It had taken off from Logan and then returned, according to an official at Massport, which manages the airport, who said the plane "had a

landing gear issue."

There were no injuries. Video showed the plane coming into the airport with only one wheel down and landing, with one of its wings resting on the ground.

The plane was on its way to Bar Harbor, Maine, when the pilot was informed about an "anomaly" with the landing gear just after takeoff, according to Cape Air.

**Man pleads not guilty to starting massive wildfire**

**CA** RANCHO CUCAMONGA — A California man has pleaded not guilty to starting a fire that authorities said ballooned into a massive wildfire and forced the evacuation of thousands of homes.

Online court records show Justin Wayne Halstenberg, 34, entered the plea from jail in a video arraignment Tuesday in Rancho Cucamonga. He was denied bail and appointed an attorney, the records show.

Halstenberg's next court appearance is set for Monday.

Halstenberg is charged with 11 arson-related crimes, the records show. Authorities said the delivery driver from Norco attempted to start three fires within an hour on Sept. 5 — two that were extinguished by firefighters and a good Samaritan and a third that became the Line Fire, which has charred 61 square miles in the mountains east of Los Angeles.

**Contest winner removed 20 Burmese pythons**

**FL** WEST PALM BEACH — It's official, the Florida Python Challenge this year has a winner.

The \$10,000 grand prize went

to Ronald Kiger, who removed 20 Burmese pythons from the Florida Everglades during the 10-day hunt, which was meant to bring awareness to the threat that these pythons pose to the ecosystem. Last year, he was the direct runner-up to the grand prize winner.

Representatives from Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission announced Kiger's win in a Tuesday morning meeting in Duck Key. This year, more than 800 people from 33 states and Canada participated in the challenge, and hunters removed 195 Burmese pythons from the wild.

Thomas Hobbs won \$2,500 for leading the novice category by catching 16 Burmese pythons. Jeff Lince caught five pythons, winning \$2,500 in the military category.

**Court upholds conviction in notorious sex case**

**NY** NEW YORK — A U.S. court on Tuesday upheld disgraced British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell's conviction on sex trafficking charges for helping the late financier Jeffrey Epstein abuse underage girls.

Maxwell's lawyers had argued that her convictions violated an agreement Epstein reached with federal prosecutors 15 years ago in which he agreed to plead guilty to sex crimes and his co-conspirators were granted immunity. The lawyers also said some of the charges were brought after the statute of limitations had expired, and alleged judicial errors during her trial and sentencing.

But a three-judge panel of the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Ap-

peals in New York rejected all of those arguments.

Maxwell, 62, was found guilty in December 2021 of luring young girls to Epstein so he could molest them, between 1994 and 2004. She was sentenced to 20 years in prison in June 2022.

Epstein killed himself in 2019 while awaiting trial.

The case has drawn widespread attention because of Epstein and Maxwell's links to royals, presidents and billionaires.

Maxwell is serving her sentence at a low-security federal prison in Tallahassee, Fla.

**Order bans 'conversion therapy' use on minors**

**KY** FRANKFORT — Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear banned the use of "conversion therapy" on minors in Kentucky on Wednesday, calling his executive order a necessary step to protect children from a widely discredited practice that tries to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity through counseling.

The governor took action using his executive powers after efforts to enact a law banning the practice repeatedly failed in the state's Republican-dominated legislature. Beshear signed the executive order during a statehouse ceremony attended by activists for LGBTQ+ rights.

The order bans the practice and makes it illegal to use state or federal funds to provide the therapy on minors. It also gives the state's board of licensure the authority to take action against anyone found to have practiced conversion therapy on minors.

— From wire reports

STARS  AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

Reporting  
World, National  
and Military News

# Offenses taking over defense-minded SEC

Associated Press

Tennessee had piled up 37 points and nearly 300 yards of offense by the time the first quarter mercifully came to an end last week against Kent State. It turned out that mercy for the Golden Flashes was still quite a ways away.

The then-No. 7 Vols pushed their lead to 65-0, and that gaudy yardage total over 500, by the time the teams trudged to the locker rooms at Neyland Stadium. That is when Tennessee finally pulled back on the reins of coach Josh Heupel's high-powered offense, content to kick just a couple of second-half field goals and move on to bigger games against better opponents.

Here is the scary thing for all of them, beginning with No. 15 Oklahoma on Saturday: The Vols didn't even play that well.

At least, that was the assessment of Nico Iamaleava, who threw for 173 yards and a touchdown before he left early.

"I think there's still room for improvement," the freshman quarterback insisted. "I think that's every day what we're working for, it's to get 1% better. Anything that we can do to get our offense (going), whether that's a tempo or being set — no pre-snap penalties — everything that goes into play, yeah, there is still a lot of room for improvement."

Maybe Iamaleava sees what a lot of people are seeing already this season: It's going to take points to win in the SEC.

Mississippi leads the nation in total offense, averaging 692 yards per game, thanks primarily to the nation's No. 1 passing game led by quarterback Jaxon Dart. No. 6 Tennessee is right behind, averaging 639.3 yards, a total that could have been much bigger had the Vols not backed off in a 69-3 win over Chattanooga, a 51-10 rout of then-No. 24 NC State and the win over Kent State.

Tennessee still leads the na-

tion in scoring at 63.7 points per game — Ole Miss is second at 56 points — with a bunch of SEC teams close behind. In fact, the SEC has four of the top 10 nationally in total offense and five of the top 11 in scoring offense, a lineup that includes Texas, the new No. 1 in the AP Top 25.

The SEC has long had a reputation of stout defenses, despite outliers such as Steve Spurrier's Florida teams and Peyton Manning's teams at Tennessee. That so many of its teams are scoring at such a high rate this season is starting to raise some eyebrows.

Fifth-ranked Ole Miss scored on its first five possessions last week against Wake Forest, and its 96-yard touchdown drive during the 40-6 rout was the fourth time the Rebels have driven at least 90 yards for a TD this season. That followed a 76-point thrashing of Furman and a 49-point win over Middle Tennessee, a program in a bowl

game just two years ago.

"There's a lot of positives to know that you can have a 34-point road win against an ACC team and not play up to our standards, and leave a lot of points out there," Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin said. "Like I told them, it's a good and bad thing. It depends what you make of it. It's really good if you change those things, take care of the ball and make better decisions."

Of course, some of those gaudy offensive numbers in the SEC are inflated early in the season, the byproduct of soft nonconference schedules. Tennessee's scoring average almost certainly will take a hit when it plays Oklahoma this weekend, and Georgia and Kentucky just showed they still play defense in the Bulldogs' 13-12 win on Saturday.

Still, it's a safe bet it's going to take a lot more than 13 points to keep winning in the SEC this season.

## Irish look to find consistency in running game

Associated Press

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Running back Jeremiyah Love provided Notre Dame's lone Week 2 rushing highlight when he took a handoff, hurdled a Northern Illinois defender and sprinted 34 yards for the score.

It was a far better effort last weekend when the Fighting Irish rushed for 362 yards and six TDs in a 66-7 rout at Purdue, the most lopsided result in series history.

Fans are eager to see what No. 17 Notre Dame does for an encore Saturday when Miami (Ohio) visits South Bend — and whether it can help get the rest of the offense in sync.

"I feel like the running backs, or the running back room in general, on any team, if that is established, you know, then it opens up the passing game,"

Love said. "We just have to come out and practice hard every day, and eventually we'll get better chemistry."

It seems like a perfect match-up for the Irish (2-1), who came out of last week's game averaging 222.7 yards rushing per game and 6.4 yards per carry. The RedHawks are allowing 182.5 yards per game despite being both the defending Mid-American Conference champion and a heavy preseason favorite to repeat.

Now Notre Dame faces a different type of hurdle — injuries. An already young offensive line took two more blows at Purdue when right guard Billy Schrauth and center Ashton Craig were hurt. Neither returned to the game as Rocco Spindler took over for Schrauth and guard Pat Coogan replaced

Craig at center. Notre Dame also lost Charles Jagusah, the projected starter at tackle, with a torn pectoral muscle in August.

Coach Marcus Freeman announced earlier this week that Craig suffered a season-ending knee injury and Schrauth will miss several weeks with an injured ankle. But that doesn't mean Freeman is reversing course.

"I think you still have to be committed to running the ball," he said. "And you know, that's what our identity is. We want to be able to run the ball."

The key to success will be the play of quarterback Riley Leonard, a transfer from Duke. He rushed for 100 yards, three touchdowns and passed for 112 yards — becoming the first FBS player to run and pass for 100 yards and rush for three TDs in

the first half since Lamar Jackson did it in 2016 at Syracuse.

Leonard spent the second half wearing a headset, a welcome respite after critics called him out for his performance in the shocking 16-14 loss to Northern Illinois. Leonard ranks third among active FBS quarterbacks with 23 career TD runs.

His presence helped open things up for Love, who sprinted 48 yards down the sideline for a score on Notre Dame's fifth play. Love finished with 109 yards, getting limited work in the second half, and Jadarian Price finished with 86 yards, including a 70-yard TD run in the waning seconds of the first half.

That was a stark contrast to the inconsistent ground game in the victory at Texas A&M and the loss to Northern Illinois.

# Raiders rookie TE Bowers impresses

*Associated Press*

HENDERSON, Nev. — An NFL head coach eventually realizes if a rookie has the 'it' factor.

Las Vegas Raiders coach Antonio Pierce knows the moment he saw it in tight end Brock Bowers.

"The day he walked in the door," Pierce said Wednesday. "We knew we were getting a blue chipper. I mean, he did it day one at Georgia when he walked on campus. And he did it each and every game, each and every year.

"And he got here in rookie minicamp, and he got pads on at training camp ... then we slowed him down a little bit because he was pushing himself. And to be honest, I mean we knew what we got, just didn't want to speak on it until he did it."

Through the first two games of the season, he's done it. And it seems everyone except the shy 21-year-old from Napa, Cal-

if. is comfortable speaking on it.

"I could tell when he first showed up," said wide receiver Davante Adams, who was part of a panel of veterans who spoke to the rookies when they first arrived in Las Vegas. "And I could just tell by the way he spoke and the way he was locked in, he didn't really seem like he cared about anything other than football.

"You got those type of dudes that's young, and they come in like that and just lock in and grow and learn from all the veteran players. You can see something special in them."

Asked how he was able to break the ice with someone whose character is stoic and reserved, Adams said he still isn't sure his young teammate has thawed out.

"We still skating," Adams said. "I don't know if it's ever been fully broken."

On the field, though, Bowers is scorching.

Bowers, who had nine catches for 98 yards in Sunday's 26-23 come-from-behind win in Baltimore, is the first tight end in NFL history with at least five receptions and 50 receiving yards in each of his first two games.

Bowers' 15 receptions and 156 yards in the two games are the most for a rookie tight end since the merger. He also ranks second in the league in highest catch percentage (88.2%) on targets in the NFL this season, with a minimum of 15 targets, behind Tampa Bay's Chris Godwin (93.8%).

"I just kind of come and do my job, and I just feel like I go about my business," a coy Bowers said in front of his locker, looking a bit shellshocked surrounded by reporters. "Whenever I'm in the building, I just kind of just focus on football and, yeah, just getting after it."

Bowers said his time at Georgia helped ease his transi-

tion from college to pro, and it's been a championship mentality and attention to detail that Pierce has been appreciative of during his first official season as head coach.

"He's tough, he loves the game," Pierce said. "He doesn't care how he looks, how he talks — he just wants to play ball. And that fits our mentality."

Bowers has a chance to continue his impressive start Sunday when the Raiders host Carolina in their home opener. The Panthers have allowed a league-tying sixth-highest receptions (11) and eighth-most yards (104) to tight ends this season.

"That dude's like, been making plays from day one," Raiders quarterback Gardner Minshew said. "To get him in game situations, to have the trust in him has really been easy. He's earned it the whole time, and it's really cool to have a guy like that on your team."

## Thompson ready to lead Dolphins with Tagovailoa out

*Associated Press*

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Skylar Thompson understands the pressure that falls on him as the starting quarterback of the Miami Dolphins for the foreseeable future.

He's their leader now and is expected to help the Dolphins stay on track as they try to deliver on high expectations despite plenty of adversity to start the season.

Thompson said his approach is simple: Don't get too far ahead of himself and take things day by day.

"When tomorrow comes I'll focus on tomorrow," Thompson said Wednesday. "That's my approach to everything. That's been my approach since I've gotten here, and that's led me to success."

Thompson will likely be Mia-

mi's starter until Tua Tagovailoa returns from a concussion. When exactly that will be is unknown, but Tagovailoa will remain out until at least Week 8.

The Dolphins placed Tagovailoa on injured reserve Tuesday as he works through his third diagnosed concussion in two years. He was injured against the Buffalo Bills last Thursday when he collided head first with defensive back Damar Hamlin on a scramble.

Coach Mike McDaniel has remained adamant he won't discuss timelines prematurely, saying he's more focused on Tagovailoa getting healthy than on when the quarterback can return to the field.

"The great thing about IR is that for a month's time, there's no timelines," McDaniel said Wednesday. "I always say that,

but I'm not sure that people quite understand. If you set a timeline based upon the information that you have today, how much of whatever goes on is fulfilling the prophecy of that timeline? And is that the right thing? Especially with competitors, sometimes you can do more harm than good. Regardless, not worrying about anything as it relates to timelines is very empowering for him as a human being to recover from injury."

McDaniel said he'll know Friday if Tagovailoa can travel with the Dolphins on their trip to face Seattle on Sunday. He did not say what stage of the multi-step evaluation process Tagovailoa was in, but offered that the quarterback has been as involved with the team as protocol rules allow him to be.

"We're all not trying to rush

the process. As a matter of fact, we're trying to do the process right," McDaniel said. "That's what our focus is; I have zero concerns about him. He is in it with his teammates, and sometimes that means being on the field. Sometimes that means meetings. Sometimes that means in the training room. Sometimes that means in the locker room."

That has also included giving advice to Thompson, who has experience with being thrust into action.

Thompson started three games as a rookie in 2022, including a playoff loss to Buffalo. Filling in for Tagovailoa, who was concussed twice that season, Thompson completed 78 of 150 passes for 754 yards with two touchdowns and five interceptions.

# Brewers wrap up NL Central crown

*Associated Press*

MILWAUKEE — The Milwaukee Brewers have grown accustomed to clinching playoff berths just about every year, but this latest celebration differed from the rest because it was so unexpected.

"It was like nobody thought we were going to be here today," shortstop Willy Adames said Wednesday after the Brewers won their third NL Central title in four years. "Now we're here. I don't know what they're going to say after this."

Milwaukee became the first major league team to reach the postseason Wednesday afternoon when the Chicago Cubs' 5-3 home loss to the Oakland Athletics enabled the Brewers to wrap up the division crown.

The Brewers' clubhouse emptied of players with one out to go in the ninth inning in Chicago, a couple of hours before Milwaukee's scheduled first pitch against Philadelphia. A muffled cheer could be heard

after the final out when the Brewers won consecutive division titles for the first time in 42 years.

Milwaukee manager Pat Murphy said he watched the final outs of the Cubs' game with 90-year-old longtime Brewers broadcaster Bob Uecker.

"We were doing our show and I watched it with him," Murphy said. "What's better than that? Awesome."

The party began in earnest Wednesday night after Jake Bauers' ninth-inning RBI single gave the Brewers a 2-1 victory over the Phillies. Blue-and-gold streamers fell into the American Family Field stands as the team gathered in shallow center field.

That led to a champagne-soaked celebration in the locker room before players returned to the field to pose for a team picture while receiving a standing ovation from the fans who stuck around.

Not everyone could drink the

champagne. Rookie outfielder Jackson Chourio is still only 20 years old.

"I think maybe I'll grab a Coke or something," Chourio joked through a translator.

This marks the Brewers' sixth postseason berth in seven years, a remarkable accomplishment for a small-market team that made the playoffs just twice in a 35-year stretch from 1983-2017.

Although the Brewers have made a habit of outperforming preseason expectations, the odds seemed stacked against them even more than usual this year.

Craig Counsell, the winningest manager in Brewers history, left for the rival Cubs last offseason. Corbin Burnes, the 2021 NL Cy Young Award winner, was traded to the Baltimore Orioles.

Two-time All-Star right-hander Brandon Woodruff didn't pitch all year as he recovered from shoulder surgery, and

two-time NL reliever of the year Devin Williams missed the first half of the season with stress fractures in his back. All-Star outfielder Christian Yelich and pitchers Wade Miley and Robert Gasser went down with season-ending injuries.

"You can do all that to us, but it's still about people, and you have no idea what their best is," Murphy said. "These guys don't know what their best is and didn't know what their best was and still don't. But they know one thing: Pulling together, competing, being doubted is something that can vault you forward into a championship."

The Brewers took over first place for good at the end of April and never looked back. Now they've won back-to-back division titles for the first time since 1981-82. That 1982 season marked Milwaukee's lone World Series appearance, which ended with a seven-game loss to the St. Louis Cardinals.

## Yankees edge Mariners, clinch postseason berth

*Associated Press*

SEATTLE — A year ago, the New York Yankees were knocked out of playoff contention with a week to go in the regular season, ending a string of six straight postseason appearances.

Remembering what that was like made wrapping up a playoff berth with more than a week left this time around feel that much better.

"We've been through a lot already this year," manager Aaron Boone said. "We understand it's just a first step — but it's an important one. We're in the dance."

After spending last year sitting at home when the postseason arrived, the Yankees secured their place in the 2024 playoffs with a 2-1 win over

the Seattle Mariners in 10 innings Wednesday night.

Nestor Cortes, who pitched six shutout innings, said this Yankees team is using the sting of last season as motivation heading into October.

"Last year we were out of the playoffs. Sour feeling for us," Cortes said as New York players drenched each other in beer and bubbly during a jubilant clubhouse celebration.

"Coming into spring training, we had one goal, and that's to make the playoffs, and we're here. Obviously, the ultimate goal for every team is to be in the World Series and win the World Series. But as of right now, we're going to enjoy this moment."

New York has the best record in the American League at

89-63 and leads second-place Baltimore by five games in the AL East with 10 to play. The latest victory ensured the Yankees at least a wild card.

It's the 59th postseason appearance in franchise history, but the Yankees are still trying to end a World Series drought that dates to 2009, when New York celebrated its 27th title.

"A lot of things have come together," Boone said. "Probably better health overall. Definitely an added focus for guys that were coming off tough years. And simply put — we're better. We weren't a great team last year and this team has a chance to do something special."

Last season, the Yankees were hampered by an injury-

riddled roster that was eliminated from playoff contention on Sept. 24. Before that, they hadn't missed the postseason since 2016, when Aaron Judge had just 27 games of major league experience.

Now they're headed back to the playoffs with Judge the MVP favorite in the American League, another hitting star in Juan Soto and a starting pitching staff that might have enough depth to carry the Yankees on a deep playoff run.

"(It'll) definitely be exciting, especially after the season we had last year missing out on the postseason," Judge said. "That's what we came into the season to do, get into the postseason and give ourselves an opportunity to go out there and win a World Series."