

GAO: Cost overruns plaguing F-35 upgrade

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

The cost of the Pentagon's modernization program for the F-35 Lightning II fighter jet is more than \$6 billion over original estimates, with the date of completion now five years later than the initial timeline, a federal watchdog said Wednesday.

The so-called Block 4 modernization will not be complete until 2031 at the earliest, the Government Accountability Office said in a 54-page report on the program.

The report also found that the Defense Department was paying incentives to contractors even though production deadlines had not been met.

The F-35 is a fifth-generation single-engine stealth fighter characterized by advanced sensors, electronics and networking capabilities. Its advanced features make it the leading

strike-fighter aircraft for the Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy.

The Defense Department is in the seventh year of a \$16.5 billion modernization effort to upgrade the F-35's hardware and software, the report said.

Central to the Block 4 modernization is Lockheed Martin's Technology Refresh 3, or TR-3, a suite of hardware and software upgrades.

Congress in 2023 directed the Defense Department to manage the Block 4 and TR-3 elements collectively as a subprogram of the joint strike fighter program, the GAO said.

"As a major subprogram, DOD will have improved insight into Block 4 cost, schedule, and performance, allowing it to make more informed decisions about the modernization effort," the report said.

Implementation of the sub-

program, however, has had drawbacks.

"According to program officials, the new Block 4 major subprogram will have fewer capabilities, will experience schedule delays, and will have unknown costs until the program office finishes developing its cost estimate," the GAO said. That estimate is expected before year's end.

The GAO offered a mix of optimism and warning in the report's conclusion.

"In our reviews of the F-35 program over the last 2 decades, we have routinely recounted cost and schedule overruns and other shortfalls," the report said. "With the program now focused on production and modernization, it has an opportunity to cut a new path of greater accountability for delivering highly capable aircraft that meet warfighter needs at the

pace of relevance."

But after 20 years of production, the F-35 program "continues to overpromise and under-deliver," the GAO said.

Compounding the problem is that contractors are rewarded incentive fees even as "delivery time frames continue to worsen," according to the report.

"In recent years, the program paid contractors, such as Lockheed Martin, hundreds of millions of dollars in incentive fees that were intended to improve on-time delivery," the report said. "However, the structure of on-time delivery incentives allowed the contractor to deliver aircraft up to 60 days late and still earn some of the fee."

To avoid rewarding late deliveries, GAO said, the program should reevaluate its use of fees in future contracts and better align them to achieve desired production outcomes.

Trump justifies US strike against Venezuelan gang

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Wednesday justified the lethal military strike that his administration said was carried out a day earlier against a Venezuelan gang as a necessary effort by the United States to send an unmistakable message to Latin American cartels.

Asked why the military did not instead interdict the vessel and capture those on board, Trump said the operation would cause drug smugglers to think twice about trying to move drugs into the U.S.

Tuesday's strike was an astonishing departure from typical U.S. drug interdiction efforts at a time when Trump has or-

dered a major Navy buildup in the waters near Venezuela.

Later Wednesday, Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned such operations "will happen again."

Rubio said previous U.S. interdiction efforts in Latin America have not worked in stemming the flow of illicit drugs into the United States and beyond.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said on "Fox & Friends" that Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro was running his country "as a kingpin of a drug narco-state."

Hegseth said officials "knew exactly who was in that boat" and "exactly what they were doing." But the Republican administration has not presented

any evidence supporting Trump's claim that operators of the vessel were from Tren de Aragua and were trying to smuggle in drugs.

Venezuela's government, which has long minimized the presence of Tren de Aragua in the South American country, limited its reaction to the strike to questioning the veracity of a video publicized by the Trump administration showing the attack.

Trump and administration officials have repeatedly blamed the gang for being at the root of the violence and illicit drug dealing that plague some American cities.

The president on Tuesday repeated his claim — contradicted

by a declassified U.S. intelligence assessment — that Tren de Aragua is operating under Maduro's control.

In announcing the strike, Trump said the operation, which he said killed 11, was carried out in international waters. He also noted that the gang is designated by the U.S. government as a foreign terrorist organization.

Unlike its counterparts from Colombia, Brazil and Central America, Tren de Aragua has no large-scale involvement in smuggling cocaine across international borders, according to InSight Crime, which last month published a 64-page report on the gang based on two years of research.

Army cuts command selection program

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Army has cut a program it used in recent years to pick officers to lead battalions and brigades and select the top enlisted leaders for those formations, the service's Human Resources Command announced this week.

The Command Assessment Program, or CAP, has been discontinued after a review of Army officer promotions systems ordered by the Pentagon's personnel and readiness office in June, Maj. Travis Shaw, an Army spokesman, said Wednesday. CAP — which was also known as the Army Warrior Leader Certification — was first piloted in 2019 when service leaders billed it as a more thorough vetting solution to select the top officers and enlisted leaders for the service's battal-

ions, brigades and medical services and acquisitions formations led by lieutenant colonels and colonels.

CAP was billed as “a true 360-degree assessment” of leaders by former Army Secretary Christine Wormuth who on Jan. 13 made the process an official Army program just days before leaving the office when President Donald Trump's administration returned to the White House. She and other Army leaders touted the program as a means to filter out any “conscious or unconscious” biases against soldiers seeking command, especially those from minority groups.

CAP added various assessments including physical, psychological and communications evaluations before a selection board determined which candi-

dates would be OK'd for command or senior enlisted leadership. CAP also included subordinates' evaluations and peer feedback in the selection process instead of only performance reviews from superior officers.

The Army previously said CAP had been used to evaluate some 2,000 officers and command sergeants major for top leadership positions annually since 2020.

The service now will return to its legacy system for selecting brigade and battalion commanders and enlisted leaders, according to HRC. In that process, a board of senior officers considered candidates from a centralized selection list, or CSL, and generates an order-of-merit list based on the board's evaluation of soldiers' “past assignments, performance and dem-

onstrated potential,” Shaw said.

He and other Army officials did not provide a specific reason for the service's decision to end CAP. Army Secretary Dan Driscoll ordered a review of the program earlier this year.

“The Army remains committed to selecting the best leaders to lead our formations and fight and win our nation's wars,” Shaw said.

Under the legacy CSL system, candidates' positions will be determined by the boards' ranking of them against their peers, with the most favorable candidates ranked highest on the order-of-merit list making them eligible for their top assignment choices, according to the Army. Past results from the CAP program's evaluations will not be considered going forward, Shaw added.

DOD OKs use of Navy base for Chicago ICE operations

The Washington Post

The Pentagon has approved the use of a Navy base on the outskirts of Chicago as a staging ground from which the Trump administration can launch operations against undocumented immigrants, said two defense officials familiar with the issue.

Naval Station Great Lakes will serve as a hub in upcoming operations overseen by the Department of Homeland Security, the officials said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

It could also potentially be used as a place to house National Guard or active-duty service members, if President Donald Trump orders a surge of U.S. troops to the city, as he did this summer in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.

The approval, which has not

previously been reported, comes after DHS sought permission late last month for agents with Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other law enforcement personnel to use the base. It also comes as Gov. JB Pritzker and other top officials in Illinois decry the president's aggressive tactics, lack of coordination and characterization of Chicago as a “hell-hole” of crime requiring federal intervention.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's office did not respond to requests for comment. Other defense officials referred questions to DHS, which issued a statement that did not answer questions about the base's usage.

The approval to use Great Lakes, which is primarily used for training Navy recruits, comes as Trump asserts broad control to deploy the military domestically.

NATO says ammo output is catching up to Russia's

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — NATO is narrowing the gap with Russia when it comes to ammunition production, with allies increasing their output sixfold over the past two years, the alliance's top official said Thursday.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, speaking at a security conference in Prague, said the situation is a marked turnaround from where the alliance was when Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

“Until recently, Russia was producing more ammunition than all NATO allies, including the U.S., including Turkey, the whole of NATO together,” Rutte said. “Much faster than we possibly could. And their economy is not bigger than Texas.”

A push inside Europe to ramp

up production has allies catching up, however.

“If we look only at the countries of the European Union, their annual capacity to produce artillery ammunition will be six times that of just two years ago. Six times,” Rutte said. “That's two million rounds by the end of this year.”

As a result, stockpiles are filling up and NATO is “narrowing the production gap with Russia,” he said.

But while there have been gains in ammunition production, allies are still lagging in other areas.

Russia now allocates 40% of its budget to its warfighting efforts, Rutte said.

This year, Russia is expected to roll out at least 1,500 tanks, 3,000 armored vehicles and hundreds of Iskander missiles, Rutte said.

DC sues over Guard deployment

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The District of Columbia on Thursday challenged President Donald Trump's use of the National Guard in Washington, asking a federal court to intervene even as he plans to send troops to other cities in the name of driving down crime.

Brian Schwalb, the district's elected attorney general, said in a lawsuit that the deployment, which now involves more than 1,000 troops, is an illegal use of the military for domestic law enforcement.

"No American jurisdiction should be involuntarily subjected to military occupation," Schwalb wrote.

The White House said deploying the Guard to protect federal assets and assist law enforcement is within Trump's authority as president.

"This lawsuit is nothing more

than another attempt — at the detriment of D.C. residents and visitors — to undermine the President's highly successful operations to stop violent crime in D.C.," spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said.

Members of the D.C. National Guard have had their orders extended through December, according to a Guard official. While that does not necessarily mean all those troops will serve that long, it is a strong indication that their role will not wind down soon.

The Republican president has credited the weeklong surge in Washington with reining in crime and said that he plans to send the National Guard into Chicago and Baltimore, despite staunch opposition in those Democrat-led cities.

In the nation's capital, Mayor Muriel Bowser, a Democrat,

has backed up some of Trump's claims that crime is down during the takeover, but data shows and critics argue that crime was already falling in the city before the surge.

A federal judge in California ruled Tuesday that Trump's deployment of National Guard troops to Los Angeles after protests over immigration raids in June was illegal.

The ruling does not directly apply to Washington, where the president has more control over the Guard than in states.

The lawsuit is the second from Schwalb — whose office is separate from Washington's federal U.S. attorney, a presidential appointee — against the Trump administration since Trump asserted control over the city's police department and sent in the Guard. Those actions have been met with protests from some residents.

US ordered to backpedal on \$2B cuts to Harvard

Associated Press

BOSTON — A federal judge in Boston on Wednesday ordered the Trump administration to reverse its cuts of more than \$2.6 billion in research funding for Harvard University, delivering a significant victory to the Ivy League school in its battle with the White House.

U.S. District Judge Allison Burroughs ruled the cuts amounted to illegal retaliation for Harvard's rejection of the Trump administration's demands for changes to Harvard's governance and policies.

The government had tied the funding freezes to Harvard's delays in dealing with antisemitism, but the judge said the university's federally backed research had little connection to discrimination against Jews.

"A review of the administrative record makes it difficult to conclude anything other than that (the government) used antisemitism as a smokescreen for a targeted, ideologically-motivated assault on this country's premier universities," Burroughs wrote.

The ruling reverses a series of funding freezes that later became outright cuts as the Trump administration escalated its fight with the nation's wealthiest university. The administration has also sought to prevent the school from hosting foreign students and threatened to revoke its tax-exempt status in a clash watched widely across higher education.

The restoration of federal money would revive Harvard's sprawling research operation and hundreds of projects that sustained cuts. But whether Harvard actually receives the federal money remains to be seen. The government is planning an immediate appeal, White House spokeswoman Liz Huston said in a statement.

Senate grills RFK Jr. over chaos at CDC

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. came under pointed bipartisan questioning at a raucous three-hour Senate committee hearing Thursday, about — among other things — turmoil at federal health agencies and efforts to pull back recommendations for COVID-19 vaccinations.

Kennedy's exchanges with Democratic senators on the panel repeatedly devolved into shouting, from both sides.

But some Republican senators also expressed unease with his changes to COVID-19 policies.

Republican North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis and others asked him why the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was fired last week, less than a month into her tenure.

Kennedy said she was dishonest, and that CDC leaders who left the agency last week in support of her deserved to be fired.

He also criticized CDC recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic tied to lockdowns and masking policies, and wrongly claimed that they "failed to do anything about the disease itself."

"The people who at CDC who oversaw that process, who put masks on our children, who closed our schools, are the people who will be leaving," Kennedy said. He later said they deserved to be fired for not doing enough to control chronic disease.

The Senate Finance Committee had called Kennedy to a hearing about his plans to "Make America Healthy Again," but Democratic senators pressed Kennedy on his actions around vaccines.

Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon said Kennedy had "stacked the deck" of a vaccines committee, replacing scientists with "skeptics and conspiracy theorists."

"Clearly you have an agenda," said Sen. Raphael Warnock, of Georgia. "It is a threat to the public health of the American people. It's clear that you are carrying out your extremist beliefs."

Last week, the Trump administration fired the CDC's director less than a month into her tenure. Several top CDC leaders resigned in protest, leaving the agency in turmoil. The ousted director, Susan Monarez, wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* on Thursday that Kennedy was trying to weaken public health protections.

"I was told to preapprove the recommendations of a vaccine advisory panel newly filled with people who have publicly expressed antivaccine rhetoric," Monarez wrote.

Kennedy told senators he didn't make such an ultimatum, though he did concede that he ordered Monarez to fire career CDC scientists.

Portugal mourns in wake of deadly streetcar derailment

Associated Press

LISBON, Portugal — Investigators sifted through the wreckage of a streetcar in downtown Lisbon on Thursday, trying to determine why the popular tourist attraction derailed during the busy summer season, killing 16 people and injuring 21, five of them seriously.

The dead were all adults, Margarida Castro Martins, head of Lisbon's Civil Protection Agency, told reporters. She didn't provide their names or nationalities, saying that their families would be informed first.

Another 21 people were injured in Wednesday's crash, she said, adding that they were men and women between the ages of 24 and 65 as well as a 3-year-old child.

The injured included Portuguese people as well as two Germans, two Spaniards and one person each from France, Italy,

Switzerland, Canada, Morocco, South Korea and Cape Verde, she said.

The range of nationalities reflected how big a draw the renowned 19th-century streetcar was for tourists who are packing the Portuguese capital during the summer season. Portugal observed a national day of mourning Thursday after the capital's worst disaster in recent history.

The yellow-and-white streetcar, known as Elevador da Gloria, was lying on its side on the narrow road that it travels on, its sides and top crumpled. It crashed into a building where the road bends, leaving parts of the mostly metal vehicle crushed.

The electric streetcar, technically called a funicular, is harnessed by steel cables, with the descending car helping with its weight to pull up the other one.

The car can carry more than 40 people, seated and standing. It is also commonly used by Lisbon residents.

Francesca di Bello, a 23-year-old tourist from Italy on vacation in Lisbon with her family, had been on the Elevador da Gloria a few hours before the derailment.

They walked by the cordoned-off crash site on Thursday, shocked by the crumpled wreckage. Asked if she would ride a funicular again in Portugal or elsewhere, di Bello was emphatic. "Definitely not," she said.

Though authorities gave no details about those killed, the transport workers' trade union SITRA said that the streetcar's brakeman, André Marques, was among the dead. Officials declined to speculate on whether a faulty brake or a snapped cable may have caused the derailment.

Death toll rises from Afghanistan earthquake

Associated Press

JALALABAD, Afghanistan — Hundreds of bodies have been recovered from houses destroyed by a major earthquake in Afghanistan last week, pushing the death toll to over 2,200, a Taliban government spokesman said Thursday.

A 6.0 magnitude quake struck several provinces of the mountainous and remote east on Sunday night, leveling villages and trapping people under rubble. The majority of casualties have been in Kunar, where many live in steep river valleys separated by high mountains.

Taliban spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat, who provided the updated casualty figure of 2,205, said rescue and search efforts were continuing. "Tents have been set up for people, and the delivery of first aid and emergency supplies is ongoing."

The rough terrain is hindering relief efforts. Taliban authorities have deployed helicopters and airdropped army commandos to help survivors. Aid workers have reported walking for hours to reach villages cut off by landslides and rockfall.

The Norwegian Refugee Council said it had fewer than 450 staff in Afghanistan whereas it had 1,100 in 2023, the date of the last major quake in the country. The council only had one warehouse remaining and no emergency stock.

"We will need to purchase items once we get the funding but this will take potentially weeks and people are in need now," said Maisam Shafiey, the communications and advocacy adviser for the council in Afghanistan. "We have only \$100,000 available to support emergency response efforts. This leaves an immediate funding gap of \$1.9 million."

European allies make pledge to deploy postwar 'reassurance force' for Kyiv

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — French President Emmanuel Macron said Thursday that 26 of Ukraine's allies have pledged to deploy troops as a "reassurance force" for the war-torn country once fighting ends in the conflict with Russia.

Speaking after a meeting of the so-called "coalition of the willing" in Paris, Macron said the countries had committed to deploying troops in Ukraine — or to maintaining a presence on land, at sea, or in the air — to help guarantee the country's security the day after a ceasefire or peace is achieved.

Earlier Thursday, Macron and other European leaders met with Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the U.S. envoy for peace talks, Steve Witkoff, to discuss ways of ensuring long-term military support and continued American backing for Ukraine once the conflict ends. Zelenskyy's office said he also held a closed-door meeting with Witkoff.

The European leaders — some of whom joined the meeting virtually — said Russia must now work toward ending the fighting, and the German government suggested European sanctions on Russia would increase if Moscow drags its feet. The European leaders also later spoke by phone with President Donald Trump.

Macron and British Prime

Minister Keir Starmer, who lead the group, have insisted that any European "reassurance" force in Ukraine needs the backing of the United States.

Starmer's office said after the meeting that the British prime minister "emphasized that the group had an unbreakable pledge to Ukraine, with President Trump's backing, and it was clear they now needed to go even further to apply pressure on (Russian President Vladimir) Putin to secure a cessation of hostilities."

Starmer's office also mentioned a decision from the coalition to supply long-range missiles to Ukraine "to further bolster the country's supplies."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Warehouse forklift error spurs chemical leak, fire

NY YONKERS — A chemical leak and fire at a suburban New York beauty products warehouse Tuesday may have been caused by a forklift mishap, officials said, warning neighbors to stay indoors. Commuter trains were temporarily stalled in the area ahead of the evening rush hour.

The trouble began around noon at a facility in Yonkers, a city just north of New York City's Bronx borough. Firefighters believe a forklift damaged a container while moving products around the tightly packed space, and the container leaked a chemical of some sort, Fire Commissioner William Fitzpatrick said at a news conference.

Fitzpatrick said firefighters arrived to find a large cloud of white chemical smoke pouring out of the warehouse, and within an hour, the chemical reaction intensified into a fire. Two people with pre-existing medical problems were escorted out of the area, Fitzpatrick said. About half a dozen firefighters suffered minor injuries during an hourslong response.

Jurors refuse to indict 2 accused of Trump threats

DC WASHINGTON — Federal grand jurors in the nation's capital have refused to indict two people who were charged separately with threatening to kill President Donald Trump, more evidence of a growing backlash against Trump's law enforcement intervention in Washington, D.C.

It is extraordinarily rare for a grand jury to balk at returning an indictment, but it has happened at least seven times in five cases since Trump last month ordered a surge in patrols in the District of Columbia.

The latest example occurred Tuesday, when Justice Department prosecutors told a magistrate judge that a grand jury declined to indict Edward Alexander Dana. He is accused of making a death threat against Trump while in police custody on Aug. 17. Dana also told police that he was intoxicated that night.

Grand jurors also refused to hand up an indictment against Nathalie Rose Jones, who was arrested Aug. 16 in Washington on charges that she made death threats against Trump on social media and during an interview with Secret Service agents.

Man charged with murder after door knocking prank

TX HOUSTON — Police have charged a Houston man with murder in the fatal shooting of an 11-year-old boy who knocked on the door of a home and ran away as a prank, police said Tuesday.

The 42-year-old man, identified by authorities as Gonzalo Leon Jr., was taken into custody and booked into the Harris County Jail in Houston early Tuesday.

The boy, Julian Guzman, and a cousin had been attending a birthday party Saturday night when they "became bored and wanted to ring doorbells, or play 'ding dong ditch,'" according to a probable cause affidavit.

Police departments around

the country have issued public service announcements in recent months warning people that such actions aren't funny but are dangerous.

Bill to require parents be notified of ICE at school

CA SACRAMENTO — California schools would have to create plans for notifying parents and teachers when immigration enforcement is on campus under a bill passed Tuesday by the state Legislature.

The bill would also require California State universities and community colleges, and request University of California campuses, to send alerts to students, faculty and staff when immigration enforcement is present. It now heads to Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, who has until Oct. 12 to sign it into law. The legislation would remain in effect until 2031.

"Students cannot learn unless they feel safe," Democratic Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi said. "For decades we had a bipartisan agreement to keep educational institutions, schools, campuses, free from immigration enforcement activities."

Indian community wants to ban convicted members

AZ SACATON — The Gila River Indian Community in Arizona is weighing a new ordinance that would allow for the banishment and disenrollment of tribal members convicted of violent crimes.

If adopted, the proposal would mark the first time a trib-

al government in the state formalized such a measure into its criminal code.

The tribe's council is asking members for input on the proposal through an online survey that closes on Sept. 13. The survey was initially set to close at the end of August, but was extended last week for another two weeks.

The proposal follows months of curfews prompted by violence in the community and a recent change in law enforcement leadership that tribal officials described as part of broader efforts to enhance public safety.

Deputy resigns after he aided immigration agents

CO DENVER — A Colorado sheriff's deputy who was disciplined for helping federal immigration agents make an arrest of a college student from Brazil has resigned.

Alexander Zwinck no longer works for the Mesa County Sheriff's Office, department spokesperson Heather Benjamin said Tuesday. Zwinck's departure prompted the state's attorney general to drop a lawsuit against him over accusations that the deputy illegally shared information with immigration agents.

Attorney General Phil Weiser sued to get a judge to order Zwinck to follow a new state law after he was accused of helping immigration agents arrest the student in June. It bars local government employees including law enforcement from sharing identifying information about people with federal immigration officials.

— From wire reports

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Military pride central to Army, Kansas St.

Associated Press

MANHATTAN, Kan. — There is a little more meaning when Army plays certain schools in football.

Kansas State is one of them.

It might not seem like it at first glance. One of the nation's flagship military schools has only played the land-grant college twice in its history, the first matchup at West Point in 1966 and the second coming 21 years later at Kansas State.

Yet the Wildcats always have been closely tied to the Black Knights. Their campus is a short drive from Fort Riley, which traces its roots to the early 1850s, when it was built to protect settlers along the Oregon and Santa Fe trails. Over the years, the base has served as the home to the famed Buffalo Soldiers, and it remains the home of the renowned 1st Infantry Division.

It is common for soldiers to take classes at Kansas State. And just as common for its alumni to serve in the military.

So when Army coach Jeff Monken was asked to ponder the

Black Knights' difficult road test against the Wildcats on Saturday night, the first silver lining that came to mind was this: "Maybe we'll have a little bit of a hometown crowd in attendance, among the huge crowd that I know will be cheering for them."

Probably wishful thinking.

Still, Monken said, "It's awesome to be traveling to a place where we know there's going to be American soldiers close by, and in attendance, and there's a pride that comes with the Army team coming to town. That means a lot to us."

It means a lot to Kansas State, too. The school holds a "Fort Riley Day" each season, and naturally, officials chose the matchup with Army this year. So the men and women of the Big Red One — the nickname for the 1st Infantry — will be there Saturday night with vehicles and demonstrations, and pregame ceremonies include a flyover and skydiving team.

The 130th Field Artillery Brigade, provided by the Kansas

Army National Guard and headquartered in Manhattan, also will be on hand. Their booming 75mm Pack howitzers will accompany the marching band's halftime performance of the "1812 Overture."

Pageantry aside, both schools have a lot to prove on the football field.

The Black Knights are coming off one of the best seasons in their storied history, when a 12-2 record included a perfect run through the American Athletic Conference and a victory in the Independence Bowl. But with several key players having departed, Army stumbled through last week's opener, losing to FCS-level Tarleton State in double overtime.

The Wildcats, who went 9-4 last season, opened this campaign with a close loss to Iowa State in Dublin, Ireland. Then they came home for a get-right game against FCS-level North Dakota last weekend and needed a last-minute touchdown to avoid an upset.

"There are no excuses, and

we've talked about that with the guys," Kansas State coach Chris Klieman said. "It's not a talent issue. We have good talent. It's an execution and a little bit of a discipline issue, and those things are going to get corrected."

They'd better get fixed in a hurry. One of the biggest challenges in facing the Black Knights is dealing with their triple-option attack, which few teams run in college football these days. Two of the most important things in stopping it: execution and discipline.

Klieman knows that as well as anyone. He has faced Monken before, albeit in a much different situation long ago. He was defensive coordinator at North Dakota State in 2012, when the Bison beat Monken's Georgia Southern team in the FCS semifinals.

"Army will be a big task for us," Klieman said. "They have a really good team and they're really well coached. I've known Coach Monken an awful long time and have tons of respect."

Jets say facing Rodgers, Steelers 'like any other game'

Associated Press

FLORHAM PARK, N.J. — Sauce Gardner shared a special handshake and plenty of laughs with Aaron Rodgers during their two years as teammates with the New York Jets.

They'll square off as opponents Sunday when Rodgers and the Pittsburgh Steelers come to MetLife Stadium for one of the juiciest storylines in Week 1 of the NFL season.

Just don't expect the Jets to add any extra spice this week when it comes to talking about their former quarterback.

"I don't know," a smiling Gardner said Tuesday. "I'm just preparing like any other game."

Truth is, it's not quite that simple.

After all, it's not often that one

of the greatest passers in league history is cut by a team after two years of Super Bowl aspirations that fizzled miserably — helped in large part by a season-ending injury four snaps into his debut with his new squad — and then signs, at 41, with one of the league's most decorated franchises.

And to top it off, Rodgers will take the field for the first time with his new team against his former team.

"I don't care who's back there," insisted edge rusher Jermaine Johnson, who's on track to return from a torn Achilles tendon in Week 2 last season. "I've got a job to do for this team. And whoever the quarterback is, I get paid to put him down. So whoever's back there, it doesn't matter."

Nope, no extra juice.

Oh, but then there's this: Justin Fields — who ended up replacing Rodgers in New York — will face the team for which he started last season before hitting the bench after leading the Steelers to a 4-2 start.

"I mean, yeah, the storyline's crazy," a smiling Fields acknowledged. "I mean, that's why the NFL set us up for Week 1, just for that."

All the hype, though, is for outside the Jets' facility.

Rodgers came to the Jets in 2023 with lots of hype and even greater expectations, as the Jets were labeled Super Bowl contenders. But a torn Achilles tendon sunk New York's season just as it started and then Rodgers and the Jets struggled to a 5-12 finish last year that ended up costing coach

Robert Saleh and general manager Joe Douglas their jobs.

Enter new coach Aaron Glenn and general manager Darren Mougey, and a clean slate for the franchise. That meant the difficult decision by the new regime to move on from Rodgers in the off-season — followed by Rodgers publicly criticizing the way the team handled his departure.

Glenn, who has preached about the Jets focusing on the present and their own task at hand, bristled a bit when asked what he saw of Rodgers last season as the team was deciding the quarterback's future.

"That's been gone," Glenn said. "I'm not going to answer questions about guys that aren't here and what I saw. Right now, I'm looking at what our guys can do."

Auger-Aliassime an outlier in men's semis

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Before knowing for sure that he would need to get past Jannik Sinner to reach a Grand Slam final for the first time, Felix Auger-Aliassime was asked to assess the U.S. Open's No. 1 seed and defending champion.

"What to say about Jannik's game?" said Auger-Aliassime, who is seeded 25th. "He's been obviously untouchable, at times."

That's a pretty apt description for a guy closing in on becoming the first man to win consecutive titles at Flushing Meadows since Roger Federer collected five in a row from 2004 through 2008.

In Friday's semifinals, Auger-Aliassime might be taking on the toughest task in tennis at the moment, particularly on hard courts: Sinner is on a 26-match Grand Slam unbeaten streak on that surface, which includes titles at the past two Australian Opens in addition to last year's U.S. Open.

The 24-year-old from Italy is

also coming off a Wimbledon championship in July for his fourth career major trophy.

Nothing easy about the other men's semifinal, either. That one features 24-time Slam champion Novak Djokovic, who is 38, against Carlos Alcaraz, who already owns five such titles at age 22.

"I know he's hungry," Alcaraz said about Djokovic, who exited each of the year's other three majors in the semifinals. "I know his ambition for more."

Just three weeks ago, Auger-Aliassime went up against Sinner at the Cincinnati Open and it wasn't exactly a close contest. Sinner won 6-0, 6-2.

They hadn't met since 2022, when Auger-Aliassime won both matchups against a guy who wasn't yet the Sinner the world knows today.

Auger-Aliassime offered a rundown of ways in which Sinner is a different player now.

"I give him credit. You have to give credit when it's due. When somebody does the work and they improve and they get

to that level, you just have to tip your hat," said the 25-year-old from Canada, who lost his only previous Grand Slam semifinal at the 2021 U.S. Open. "Physicality, movement got much better. Stronger physically. The serve, the forehand more precise. The backhand was always consistent. The return was always good, deep. Yeah, those are the main things."

That's all, huh?

Sinner has won his past 31 service games at the US Open. There's certainly quite a lot he does well, as he demonstrated by overwhelming his last two opponents.

In a performance Sinner described as "very solid," he dismissed No. 10 Lorenzo Musetti in the quarterfinals 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 in just 2 hours Wednesday, two nights after an even more lopsided win, 6-1, 6-1, 6-1 against No. 23 Alexander Bublik in 1 hour, 21 minutes.

That's less than 3½ hours combined over two matches. Auger-Aliassime needed 4 hours, 10 minutes just to get past

No. 8 Alex de Minaur in his quarterfinal.

Sinner goes into Friday having claimed his past 31 service games in a row, saving 10 break points in that span.

Against Musetti, he won 42 of the 46 points — 91% — when he got his first serve in.

And then there are those crisp, clean, booming groundstrokes, including one 97 mph up-the-line forehand on a run-and-reach to earn the last break point he needed against Musetti.

"Jannik was on another level," Musetti said. "I never played, honestly, someone who put me (in) this kind of rush in the rally."

Alcaraz and Sinner have combined to win the last seven majors — while playing each other in the last two finals — and Djokovic was the champ at the other three in that stretch, including the 2023 U.S. Open.

During that same 12-Slam span, Auger-Aliassime never made it past the fourth round and exited in the first or second round at nine of them.

Anisimova upsets Swiatek in US Open quarterfinals

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Amanda Anisimova upset Iga Swiatek 6-4, 6-3 in the U.S. Open quarterfinals Wednesday, less than two months after losing to the six-time Grand Slam champion in the Wimbledon final by a 6-0, 6-0 score.

The No. 8-seeded Anisimova reached her third major semifinal and first at Flushing Meadows.

"To come back from Wimbledon like that is really special to me," said Anisimova, a 24-year-old who was born in New Jersey and grew up in Florida. "I feel like I worked so hard to try and turn around from that. ... Today is really special."

The powerful strokes and poise she displayed in Arthur

Ashe Stadium against No. 2 Swiatek were such a striking contrast to what happened at the All England Club on July 12.

That title match lasted just 57 minutes, and Anisimova only managed to win 24 points that day, a total she eclipsed about midway through the first set this time.

"Everybody knows how Amanda can play. Yeah, she didn't play well in Wimbledon," said Swiatek, a 24-year-old from Poland, "but it's not like she's always going to do the same mistakes or feel the same."

Anisimova cried during her runner-up speech during the trophy ceremony at Wimbledon; on Wednesday, she was all smiles while addressing thousands of supportive spectators

who kept interrupting her on-court interview with cheers.

"Playing here is so freaking special," Anisimova told them, "and I've been having the run of my life here."

On Thursday, Anisimova tried to reach a second consecutive major final. She faced four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka — who eliminated Coco Gauff on Monday — after the No. 23 seed beat No. 11 Karolina Muchova 6-4, 7-6 (3).

After one game against Swiatek in the quarterfinals Wednesday, Anisimova might have been forgiven for thinking, "Oh, no. Not this again."

That's because Anisimova served first and got broken immediately when she lost three points in a row by missing fore-

hands — one into the net, one wide, one long. But Anisimova broke right back and soon was the one dictating points with her strong, flat groundstrokes that wound up contributing to 23 total winners, 10 more than Swiatek accumulated. Anisimova also made just 12 unforced errors.

"She moved better, she played better," Swiatek said, comparing this match to the one at Wimbledon. "Everything was different."

Swiatek's serve was problematic: She only put in 50% of her first serves and was broken four times.

"I couldn't win today's match playing like that, serving like that," Swiatek said, "and with Amanda being so aggressive on the returns."

Blue Jays power past Reds, rally to win

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — George Springer had one of Toronto's five home runs as the Blue Jays rallied from five runs down to beat the Cincinnati Reds 13-9 on Wednesday night.

Daulton Varsho and Alejandro Kirk hit consecutive homers in the fourth inning, and Addison Barger and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. went back to back in the fifth. Toronto tied a season-high with its five homers.

The AL-East leading Blue Jays went deep 11 times and scored 29 runs in the three-game series, setting up a big weekend matchup with the second-place Yankees, who are 3½ games behind, beginning Friday.

Cincinnati remained five games behind the New York Mets for the third NL wild-card spot. The Reds and Mets begin a three-game series Friday.

Cincinnati scored five times in the second inning against Toronto starter Shane Bieber. Jose Trevino had a two-run single, Matt McLain an RBI single and Noelvi Marte added a two-run double. Bieber (2-1) did not allow another run or a hit over his final four innings.

Tigers 6, Mets 2: Kerry Carpenter hit a three-run homer and scored twice to help host Detroit beat New York.

Riley Greene gave the Tigers a 3-1 lead with a two-run single in the fifth inning. The AL Central leaders had lost seven of nine, including the first two games of the series.

Casey Mize (13-5) got the win, allowing one run and five hits in five innings. Detroit maintained a 10-game lead in the division.

Diamondbacks 2, Rangers 0: Zac Gallen (11-13) pitched six scoreless innings in his latest quality start and host Arizona beat Texas.

The Diamondbacks scraped together two early runs against Rangers starter Jack Leiter (9-8) and their bullpen did the rest. Jake Woodford, the last of Arizona's five pitchers, worked around a

walk in the ninth for his third save.

The Diamondbacks have won six of eight. Texas dropped two games back of the final AL wild-card spot.

Orioles 7, San Diego 5: Jackson Holliday hit a leadoff homer and Colton Cowser, Coby Mayo and Alex Jackson hit consecutive shots in the third inning — all off Nestor Cortes — and visiting Baltimore beat San Diego for its first three-game sweep of the Padres.

The Orioles, last in the AL East, took a 7-0 lead in the third, when Cortes allowed three homers on four pitches. San Diego closed the deficit when Manny Machado hit a two-run homer in a four-run sixth and Fernando Tatis Jr. homered leading off the seventh.

Mason Miller had the second immaculate inning in Padres history when he struck out Jeremiah Jackson, Ryan Mountcastle and Emmanuel Rivera on nine pitches in the eighth.

Pirates 3, Dodgers 0: Andrew McCutchen and Bryan Reynolds homered off last-minute spot starter Emmett Sheehan and host Pittsburgh beat Los Angeles.

Sheehan (5-3) got the nod when the Dodgers opted to let Shohei Ohtani skip his scheduled start while dealing with an illness. Ohtani remained in the lineup, however, and had two of Los Angeles' five hits.

Five Pirates pitchers combined for the club's major-league leading 17th shutout of the season. Mike Burrows (2-4) got the win with three innings in relief of starter Braxton Ashcraft.

Rays 9, Mariners 4: Yandy Diaz had a career-high five hits to lead host Tampa Bay to a win over Seattle, completing a three-game series sweep.

The Rays (70-69) matched a season high by winning their sixth straight game. With the win, Tampa Bay moved within 2½ games of the last AL wild-card spot.

The Mariners (73-67), four games out in the AL West and 1½ games up in the final wild-card spot, have lost five of six and 14 of 20.

Astros 8, Yankees 7: Taylor Trammell worked a bases-loaded walk to score the go-ahead run as part of a four-run eighth inning, and host Houston rallied for a win over New York.

Devin Williams (3-6) walked the bases loaded with one out, but struck out Ramón Urías before walking Trammell on five pitches to score Carlos Correa. Jeremy Peña followed with an RBI single off Camilo Doval, who was called for a balk on the next pitch, scoring Christian Walker. Doval then uncorked a wild pitch, scoring Trammell.

The Astros nearly blew a four-run lead in the ninth, as Cody Bellinger's three-run shot pulled the Yankees within one before Jazz Chisholm Jr. struck out looking.

Giants 10, Rockies 8: Matt Chapman hit two home runs after appealing a one-game suspension, and visiting San Francisco beat Colorado to finish a three-game sweep with its fourth straight victory.

Chapman gave the Giants a 1-0 lead in the second with a 450-foot shot to center field off Germán Márquez. He hit his 20th of the season in the sixth — a 423-foot three-run shot to left-center off Juan Mejia for a 9-5 advantage.

Chapman was suspended for his part in a benches-clearing brawl in Tuesday night in a 7-4 victory.

Heliot Ramos and Patrick Bailey both went 2 for 4 with an RBI and two runs scored as San Francisco won for the 10th time in 11 games to pull within four games of the Mets for the final NL wild card.

Nationals 10, Marlins 5: Nasim Núñez hit his first two career homers, and host Washington beat Miami to complete its first three-game sweep at home this season.

Brady House also went deep for the Nationals, and Luis García Jr. had two RBIs. Jackson Rutledge (3-2) pitched a scoreless inning for the win and Washington's second three-game sweep this season.

Braves 5, Cubs 1: Ha-Seong

Kim hit a three-run homer, Bryce Elder (6-9) pitched seven innings of four-hit ball and visiting Atlanta rallied for a win over Chicago.

Ozzie Albies added a solo shot in the eighth and hit a single in the seventh that broke up a combined no-hit bid by the Cubs.

Cardinals 5, Athletics 1: Willson Contreras had three hits and four RBIs, Nolan Gorman homered and Matthew Liberatore pitched 5½ shutout innings in host St. Louis' victory over the Athletics.

Liberatore (7-11) struck out seven. JoJo Romero got the final four outs for his seventh save.

Brewers 6, Phillies 3: Isaac Collins hit a three-run homer and Jose Quintana pitched effectively into the seventh inning as host Milwaukee beat Philadelphia.

Milwaukee (86-54) and Philadelphia (80-59) entered with the two best records in the National League. The Brewers increased their Central Division lead to six games over the Cubs. The Phillies remained 5½ games up in the East over the Mets.

White Sox 4, Twins 3: Brooks Baldwin had an RBI single and Michael A. Taylor followed with a go-ahead two-run double as visiting Chicago rallied to beat Minnesota for its fourth straight win.

Baldwin's hit pulled the White Sox to 3-2 with Andrew Benintendi advancing to third. After Baldwin stole second, Taylor pulled a ball down the left field line to give Chicago its first lead of the night.

Angels 4, Royals 3: Jo Adell homered and drove in every run for visiting Los Angeles in its victory over Kansas City.

Adell hit a go-ahead homer in the sixth inning for the second consecutive game. His three-run shot to center field on the first pitch he saw from reliever John Schreiber gave the Angels a 3-2 lead.

Guardians 8, Red Sox 1: Gabriel Arias hit a two-run homer that sparked a six-run second inning, and visiting Cleveland routed Boston to avoid a three-game sweep.