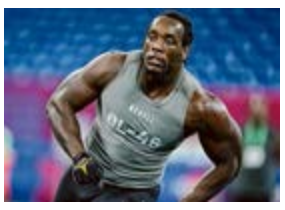
WITH THE 23RD PICK

Texans have plenty of options in NFL draft.

PAGE B1



THOUSANDS MOURN NAVALNY

Opposition leader's funeral draws big crowd in Moscow despite heavy police presence.

PAGE A4



MELDING OF ROOTS

New Mexico meets Texas in pair's home.

PAGE A12

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

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Tentative firefighters deal is reached

Whitmire offers no details on pay, financing after city's seven-year stalemate with union

By Yilun Cheng
STAFF WRITER

Mayor John Whitmire said he has reached a tentative agreement with the Houston firefighters union over their years-long pay dispute, but declined to reveal details about the total compensation owed to firefighters or how the city plans to finance the back pay.

The city of Houston and its firefighters have been embroiled in a bitter legal battle ever since a contract impasse in 2017. The city's roughly 4,000 firefighters have not had a contract during nearly all of former Mayor Sylvester Turner's tenure.

Whitmire has kept close ties to the firefighters during his political career and vowed to put an end to the contract stalemate during his mayoral campaign last year. The Thursday announcement came after regular meetings between the two parties and reflects significant compromises from both sides, the mayor said.

"A world-class city like Hous-

Firefighters continues on A7



John Whitmire appears with Houston Professional Fire Fighters Association members and supporters after their endorsement in September.

Jason Fochtman/ Staff photographer



Jasper Scherer/Staff

Democratic state Senate candidate Molly Cook talks to a potential voter while block-walking last month in Acres Homes.

In Houston, 3 Dem primaries offer rare dose of competition

But not many are seizing chance to decide who'll represent them

By Jasper Scherer
AUSTIN BUREAU

For the last 30 years, as Harris County politics saw transformational change and churned through thousands of politicians, two things seemed preordained: Voters would return John Whitmire to Austin and Sheila Jackson Lee to Washington, D.C.

That run came to an end in December when Whitmire trounced Jackson Lee in the Houston mayoral election, leaving his Texas Senate seat vacant for the first time in decades.



Yi-Chin Lee/Staff photographer

Karthik Soora, at a protest in Katy last April, is one of six Democratic candidates seeking to succeed John Whitmire.

It also put Jackson Lee's future in doubt for the first time since she was elected to Congress in 1994. The longtime Democrat, bruised by a landslide defeat, promptly filed for another congressional term only to find herself fighting for political survival against fellow Democrat Amanda Edwards, the former Houston council member whom she had effectively elbowed out of the mayor's race months earlier.

The falling dominoes have produced two of the hottest primary races in Harris Coun-

Primaries continues on A6



Jared Woodfill and Lacey Hull are GOP primary rivals.

Activist Woodfill eyes seat in House

By Cayla Harris
AUSTIN BUREAU

Jared Woodfill for years has been a divisive but prominent figure in Harris County, opposing LGBTQ rights and helping to push Texas politics further to the right.

Now, the lawyer and former Harris County GOP chair has his sights set on a new goal: the Texas House.

Woodfill, in his first bid for public office, is running against incumbent Republican Rep. Lacey Hull of Houston. Their race mirrors many of the GOP primary battles for Texas House playing out across the state this year, as Woodfill labels Hull a RINO, or a Republican in name only, and criticizes her vote last year to impeach Attorney General Ken Paxton on corruption charges.

But taking Hull's west Houston seat isn't Woodfill's only objective. He's also simultaneously mounting a long-shot bid for House speaker, a position currently held by Rep. Dade Phelan of Beaumont, who is similarly facing a primary challenge from his right over the Paxton impeachment vote.

"RINO Alert! Liberal Lacey Hull and her biggest supporter Dade Phelan want HD 138 voters to believe she is a conservative!" Woodfill posted on the social media platform X this week. "No matter how many mail pieces she sends, she can't run from her lib-

House race continues on A7

Lander's moon mission historic but flawed

By Andrea Leinfelder
STAFF WRITER

Intuitive Machines' moon mission met its main goals: The spacecraft landed mostly intact, sent photos home and collected scientific data for paying customers.

But there were significant challenges, too. Its touchdown was complicated because a safety feature wasn't properly disabled before launch. Then the lander tipped over, and its communications were slower than desired.

While the mission was historic, it was not flawless. Experts have a nuanced take on its achievements.

"There are different layers of success," said Jonathan McDowell, an astronomer with the Center for Astrophysics: Harvard and Smithsonian. "On some of them, I would give it high marks. And on others, I'd give it lower marks."

Last week, Houston's Intuitive Machines became the first commercial company to make a soft lunar landing. Its lander is the first U.S. vehicle to touch down on the moon in more than 50 years.

The science community has largely praised the company for reaching the moon and showcasing new capabilities. Experts said they are impressed by the team's ability to overcome crises and were happy to see the company's Nova-C lander enable science experiments and technology demonstrations on the moon.

But the mission didn't bring home all of the data its customers had hoped for. And ultimately, spacecraft will need to stick their landings.

"We don't want to do it this way every time we go to the moon," said Andy Aldrin, program chair for the Master of Space Operations degree program at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and the son of famed NASA astronaut Buzz

Lunar lander continues on A7

RODEO FACT OF THE DAY: SUNNY DAYS AHEAD

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Staff photo wins national award

Emotional image shows lingering pain from gun violence

By Dug Begley
STAFF WRITER

A tender moment between a shooting victim and an emotional child at a vigil — a portal into the grief and love woven into Houston's Sunnyside neighborhood as it deals with violence — has been recognized by a national panel as proof of the power of community journalism.


Shapley

Houston Chronicle staff photographer Jon Shapley was named the winner in the general news category of the National Press Photographer's Association 2024 Best of Photography contest. The contest typically draws entries from the nation's best photographers, working for national and international publications.

"I'm grateful that I get to listen to and tell stories every day," Shapley said. "People open their lives to me during incredibly difficult moments, and that is a real privilege."

Benjamin Hager, director of multimedia for the Chronicle, said the "photo is a testament to Jon's superior level of skill in navigating sensitive subject matter while delivering creative, impactful imagery."

The winning photo, taken Sept. 11, 2023, shows Joquita Lott comforting a child during a memorial for her son, 12-year-old Freddrick Johnson Jr. Her son was shot after an altercation over a slashed tire, leading later to the arrest of an 18-year-old still awaiting trial for capital murder.

Shapley, arriving at the vigil an hour after his shift ended, said he was following Lott through the crowd as neighbors came to offer condolences and hugs when the child — possibly a relative — appeared distraught and sobbing.


Jon Shapley/Staff photographer
Joquita Lott comforts a child during a Sept. 11 memorial for her son, 12-year-old Freddrick Johnson Jr., at an apartment complex where he was fatally shot. Prosecutors say an 18-year-old suspect had been feuding with the son over a slashed tire.

"You are trying to capture the difficult emotions in that moment," Shapley said. "I think it is the pain on the child's face, and when you have a real tenderness with the mother, she is comforting the child. You really see that. ... The child was sobbing, and she took a moment to assuage some of that child's pain."

Capturing that emotion is an example of Shapley's "growth, success and unwavering commitment to excellence," said Marie D. De Jesus, immediate past president of the NPPA, photo director at Houston Landing and former Chronicle staff photographer. "I am so proud of the way he represents Houston photojournalists."

The win is a first, at least recently, for the Chronicle in the national contest. In 2022, staff photographer Elizabeth Conley placed third in the portrait category.

Shapley, 38, is a UT-Austin graduate in his ninth year at the Chronicle. He previously worked at KUT and Austin Monthly.

For King & Country draws its biggest crowd in second show

By Joey Guerra
STAFF WRITER


Jason Fochtman/Staff photographer
The Christian pop group draws an audience of 54,968 Thursday at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo at NRG Park.

For King & Country made RodeoHouston history in 2022 as the first Christian pop act to play the rotating stage. At the time Joel Smallbone told the crowd he received more text messages and calls about that show "than ever in the history of being a part of a band."

REVIEW

The sibling duo's second appearance Thursday night was also a historic moment. They drew 54,968 paid attendance, a modest number by Rodeo standards but, according to Smallbone, "the largest ticketed For King & Country show in the history of the band." That's about 1,800 more than 2022.

It's easy to understand Joel and Luke Smallbone's appeal. Their songs are big, brash and designed for stadium singalongs. The lyrics are as much calls to God as they are kumbaya, love-everyone sentiments. Opener "Relate" asked, "I don't know what it's like to be you/You don't know what it's like to be me/What if we're all the same in different kinds of ways/Can you relate?"

The entire band has a manic energy onstage, running from place to place and sometimes switching between instruments. Thundering percussion anchors every song. Cymbals are frequently banged. Of the three shows so far this Rodeo season, this was by far the most dynamic. The touring lineup includes Gabe Baker, a cellist and former Rice University football star.

"Fight On, Fighter" would fit perfectly into a Coldplay setlist. The British supergroup is a clear influence. The brothers Smallbone, who are from Australia, jumped offstage during "Fine, Fine Life," playing to fans at the rails and posing for selfies. Joel Smallbone, as he did at the previous show, briefly sported a cowboy hat. He also joked about the American pronunciation of "mum."

"How do you say it? *Mom*?" he asked the crowd as he extended the vowel.

"Together" featured appearances via video from Tori Kelly and Kirk Franklin. "God Only Knows" came with a virtual Dolly Parton cameo and a real-life appearance by Miel San Marcos, a trio of Guatemalan brothers. They returned to the rails for the midtempo "Shoulders" as giddy fans snapped photos.

The setlist also included "Unsung Hero," the sweet title song from an upcoming movie about the entire Smallbone family. Their sister is Christian pop singer Rebecca St. James. They dedicated the song to their mom, er, mum and all the others in the crowd. That sentiment is something everyone can agree with, no matter how it's pronounced.

Two kids who were reported missing last month are found safe

By Peter Warren and John Wayne Ferguson
STAFF WRITERS

Two Houston children who were reported missing last month have been found safe, authorities said this week.

Authorities located 1-year-old Noah Johnson on Thursday in Minnesota, the Harris County Precinct 8 Constable's Office said. Twelve-year-old E'minie Hughes was found on Friday in Columbus, the Houston Police Department said.

Authorities first sent out an Amber Alert in Texas on Feb. 8 for Noah, two days after he had last been seen.

"At this time, we can report that Noah is safe and is getting the medical attention he desperately needs," the Constable's Office said in a news release.

The Minneapolis Police Department took his mother, Kamilah Johnson, into custody on an arrest warrant for a child endangerment charge filed in Harris County.

Click2Houston reported that a Texas Department of Family Protective Services caseworker visited Johnson on Feb. 6 for a welfare check for Noah, telling her to get her baby medical attention. She had removed him from the hospital against the advice of practitioners on Jan. 30, according to Click2Houston. When authorities returned to Johnson's residence on Feb. 8, the Johnsons were not there, KHOU said.

Houston police didn't release any more information about finding E'minie and said the investigation into her disappearance is still ongoing.

She went missing on Feb. 22 after leaving her family home on Waterchase, according to alerts police put out earlier in the week.

An Amber Alert related to her disappearance was issued on Feb. 28. Police said the alert was issued after they received information E'minie might be danger, and later said they believed she might be the victim of trafficking. Police didn't provide more information on those claims.

On Thursday, police said they believed E'minie's disappearance might be related to her use of a social media app called Tagged, a free Tinder-style dating app. No arrests have been announced in connection to her disappearance.

CORRECTION

Oscar winner Hattie McDaniel was misidentified in a story on page 2A on Thursday.

Ogg slams Teare over Soros PAC money

By Jen Rice
STAFF WRITER



Sean Teare and Kim Ogg are vying for district attorney.

Harris County District Attorney Kim Ogg is slamming opponent Sean Teare for accepting major funding from billionaire George Soros' Texas Justice and Public Safety PAC in his Democratic primary bid to unseat her.

The Texas Justice and Public Safety PAC contributed nearly $700,000 to Teare between Jan. 26 and Feb. 24, fueling the campaign's TV advertising blitz.

Soros previously supported Ogg, including a $500,000 ad buy during the 2016 general election.

The Ogg campaign put out a press release Thursday quoting Douglas Griffith, president of the Houston Police Officers' Union.

"I am very concerned with the funding of Sean Teare's campaign by a PAC funded by George Soros," Griffith said in a statement. "Teare claimed to be a friend to police, but sadly appears to side with George Soros. Other big-city DAs funded by Soros have been a disaster for the communities they represent. I am fearful that we could be the next LA or Chicago!"

In response, the Teare campaign fired back, accusing Ogg of using tactics outside the bounds of the Democratic Party.

"Kim Ogg's desperate and hypocritical attack exposes her true colors," Teare spokesperson Rocky Saligram said in a statement. "She aligns herself with GOP rhetoric, funding, and endorsements."

Soros, a Jewish investor and philanthropist, has been a popular target of Republican conspiracy theories for years.

"Attacks like these have long been buoyed by antisemitic extremists in our society," Saligram added. "It's wrong, and thankfully, voters are taking notice."

Ogg, a second term incumbent, is now fighting off her well-funded challenger with support from Houston business groups, which helped her raise $287,000 during the latest reporting period.

In a recent TV ad, Teare lays out his case: While "Kim Ogg changed" and doesn't reflect the party's values, Teare is a "real Democrat." A Teare supporter says, "I can't vote for Kim Ogg again."

Teare also received a $35,000 donation from philanthropist Liz Simons and a $200,000 contribution from the Texas Organizing Project, a progressive political advocacy group that assisted the campaign with canvassing and consulting.

The Teare campaign burned through over $550,000 in the final weeks of the race, reporting just $8,000 left in the bank.

"Obviously, he's got to spend the money to get his name out," said Renée Cross, senior executive director at the Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston. "She's got a very recognizable name."

Ogg's advertising efforts accelerated to full speed, with the campaign spending $580,000 during the reporting period, compared to just $45,000 the previous month.

"Houston is not Los Angeles — but it could be," a new Ogg ad warns, along with news footage of a Los Angeles robbery. The ad goes on to accuse Teare of wanting a "lawless Houston."

The ad also slams Teare for accepting donations from Soros: "Sean Teare is a lawyer running for district attorney who is funded by George Soros to release criminals without bail."

Houston business groups kicked in thousands of dollars to Ogg, including $15,000 from the Houston Region Business Coalition, $10,000 from the Houston Apartment Association and $10,000 from the Texas Association of Realtors PAC.

Ogg also received a $20,000 donation from Houston billionaire Tilman Fertitta, $10,000 from the "C" Club and $10,000 from Frances Moody Buzbee, the wife of attorney and former Houston City Council candidate Tony Buzbee.

Teare's campaign fundraising started strong last year — the former prosecutor raked in nearly $750,000 in the first half of 2023, including one massive $500,000 donation from Scott Freeman, owner of Archer Systems, a legal services company that specializes in legal settlement services.

Ogg later caught up with Teare, outraising his campaign's $29,000 total in January with over $132,000 in contributions, more than 40% of which came from the bail bonds industry.

Early voting in the primary ends Friday. Harris County voters then will have over 500 Election Day polling locations to choose from on March 5.

Here's your chance to see an asteroid

Space Center has one of just three displays of Bennu

By Andrea Leinfelder
STAFF WRITER



Photos by Jon Shapley/Staff photographer
Paul Spana, director of collections and curator at Space Center Houston, sets up the Bennu display on Friday. The sample was brought back by NASA's OSIRIS-REx mission.

A pristine piece of asteroid Bennu is now on display at Space Center Houston.

The pea-sized rock, weighing 0.15 grams, was collected by a NASA spacecraft that traveled seven years and 3.9 billion miles (round trip) to learn about the early solar system and how life might have formed on Earth.

The OSIRIS-REx mission brought home 121.6 total grams of material from Bennu. Most of that is being reserved for scientists around the world, with a permanent home at NASA's Johnson Space Center. There are only three places where the public can see a sliver of Bennu: Space Center Houston, the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History and the Alfie Norville Gem and Mineral Museum at the University of Arizona. The University of Arizona, which led the NASA mission, is debuting its sample next week.

Space Center Houston is the official visitor's center for the Johnson Space Center, and part of its mission is to share what NASA is working on next door. The work includes storing and studying material brought to Earth from the moon and deep space.

"Johnson Space Center trains the astronauts, but there's so much other work that goes on over there," said Paul Spana, Space Center Houston's director of collections and a curator.


A sample from the asteroid Bennu is on public display at Space Center Houston.

The Bennu sample has never been exposed to the Earth's atmosphere. It's sealed in a stainless steel container filled with nitrogen, which protects the rock from being altered by oxygen and humidity.

Visitors to Space Center Houston will see the container tucked inside a glass display. A magnifying glass helps provide a closer look at the rock inside, and NASA created a 3D image of the sample that is enlarged for a more detailed view.

A live presentation will be given three times a day to share the story of NASA's OSIRIS-REx mission that visited the asteroid and to answer any questions.

"It's got a really big story," Spana said. "For me, the takeaway is that with proper planning and great teamwork, you can do these amazing things."

Officer fatally shoots robbery suspect

By Hana Ikramuddin and John Wayne Ferguson
STAFF WRITERS

A Houston Police Department officer shot and killed a man Thursday in what authorities described as a shootout in Second Ward.

Police were searching for the man around 5 p.m., shortly after he had allegedly robbed an insurance company on Harrisburg and an ice cream shop on Brady.

The man used a handgun during the robberies, and left the businesses riding an electric scooter, said Larry Satterwhite, the Houston Police Department's executive assistant chief.

Following the second robbery a patrol officer in a car spotted the man and began to follow him, police said. The officer attempted to stop the man near the intersection of Eastwood and Brady, where the shooting happened, Satterwhite said during a briefing.

The officer pulled in front of the man and ordered the man to stop, police said. The man refused, ran away, and hid behind a tree before shooting his gun at the officer as he fled, police said

The officer fired his weapon and shot the man, killing him, Satterwhite said. It wasn't clear how many shots were fired in the exchange. The officer wasn't wounded. Investigators on Thursday night were looking for evidence of damage from the shootout in the residential area.

Police on Friday identified the officer as Alfonso Yanez, a 30-year veteran of the police department assigned to the Eastside division.

The man who was shot was described as being in his late 20s or early 30s. His name wasn't immediately released.

At the news conference, Satterwhite said the man was also a suspect in three other recent robberies in the area, but didn't provide details about when and where they occurred.

Yanez was placed on administrative duty, which is typical after a police shooting.

This is the first fatal shooting by a Houston police officer this year, according to officer-involved-shooting reports submitted to the Texas Attorney General's Office.

There have been six other fatal shootings in Houston this year by officers from other agencies, including the Harris County Sheriff's Office and the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, according to the database

Houston police officers killed 11 people in 2023 and wounded 45, according data published by the police department.

Plan to turn Conroe site into housing pulled

By Catherine Dominguez
STAFF WRITER


Jason Fochtman/Staff file photo
The former Sam Houston School in Conroe had been proposed for affordable housing apartments.

Kansas-based Overland Property Group has withdrawn its proposal to renovate the former Sam Houston School in Conroe into affordable housing, prompting longtime resident Rigby Owen to offer the city $1 million to go back to its plan to develop the historic building into a performing arts center.

Before residents were allowed to speak during a public hearing Tuesday, interim City Attorney Mike Garner read a letter from April Engstrom with Overland Property Group that the company was rescinding its offer to purchase the building and invest $30 million to create 79 affordable housing apartments.

In the letter, Engstrom said that after learning of the "dissatisfaction" of residents regarding the company's plan, she and Managing Partner Matt Gillam decided to abandon the project.

"We are disappointed the community didn't give our well-thought-out, feasible plan fair consideration, leaving the building in jeopardy without viable action plans in place," Engstrom wrote.

While about 6 acres of the 11-acre property has been under contract with Overland since December, City Administrator Gary Scott said during the council's Feb. 21 workshop, the sale is "not a done deal."

After the announcement that the company was pulling out of the deal, Owen spoke to the council, offering the funds to help the city continue its plan to create a performing arts center.

"I went through that building (Monday), and I was stunned," Owen said. "It doesn't need anything. It could start tomorrow as a performing arts center."

History of the project

In July 2020, the city issued certificates of obligation for $4.2 million to purchase the school and the 11 acres it sits on to create a performing arts center. However, the city scrapped the plan when the cost to renovate the historic structure reached $190 million.

Constructed in 1938, the building served as Sam Houston Elementary for many years before it was closed and a new campus was built in 2007 on Thompson Street.

The former school then became the Walter P. Jett Continuing Education Center. The education center is now at Woodforest Stadium.

As the city continues to face financial woes, the council has liquidated several tracts of land along with backing out of a deal in August 2022 to purchase the former Simpson Dabney building downtown for $800,000.

Monitoring city finances

Council Members Howard Wood and Harry Hardman pointed to the new Hyatt Regency Hotel and Convention Center as a major factor in the city's financial position. The $107 million-plus facility is not predicted to make money for several more years, leaving the city to cover those costs.

Hardman called the hotel the "worst financial mistake" the city has made.

"The most expensive part about that hotel project is the opportunity it cost, and this is a prime example of the opportunity we are missing today," Hardman said. "We don't have the opportunity to do the things we would like to do because of the commitment we have made."

Hardman said that while the school is in good shape, it would still be costly to renovate for its age.

"It's going to be a sizable investment to make this building operational," Hardman said.

The council did not discuss any plans for the school.

Doctor: Most hurt in clash in Gaza were shot

By Wafaa Shurafa and Bassem Mroue
ASSOCIATED PRESS

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — The head of a Gaza City hospital that treated some of those wounded in the bloodshed surrounding an aid convoy said Friday that more than 80% had been struck by gunfire, suggesting there was heavy shooting by Israeli troops.

At least 115 Palestinians were killed and more than 750 others injured Thursday, according to health officials. Witnesses said that happened when nearby Israeli troops opened fire as huge crowds raced to pull goods off an aid convoy. Israel said many of the dead were trampled in a stampede that started when desperate Palestinians in the Gaza Strip rushed the aid trucks. Israel said its troops fired warning shots after the crowd moved toward them in a threatening way.

Dr. Mohammed Salha, the acting director of Al-Awda Hospital, said that of the 176 wounded brought to the facility, 142 had gunshot wounds and the other 34 showed injuries from a stampede.

He couldn't address the cause of death of those killed because the bodies were taken to government-run hospitals to be counted. Officials at those hospitals couldn't immediately be reached.

The bloodshed underscored how chaos amid Israel's almost 5-month-old offensive has crippled the effort to bring aid to Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians, a quarter of whom the United Nations says face starvation.

The U.N. and other aid groups have been pleading for safe corridors for aid convoys, saying it has become nearly impossible to deliver supplies in most of Gaza because of the difficulty of coordinating with the Israeli military, ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of public order, including crowds of desperate people who overwhelm aid convoys.

U.N. officials say hunger is even worse in the north, where several hundred thousand Palestinians remain even though the area has been isolated and mostly leveled since Israeli troops launched their ground offensive there in late October. U.N. agencies haven't delivered aid to the north in more than a month because of military restrictions and lack of security, but several deliveries by other groups reached the area earlier this week.

Acknowledging the difficulty of getting aid in, President Joe Biden said Friday that the United States soon will begin air-dropping assistance to Gaza and will look for other ways to get shipments in, "including possibly a marine corridor."

AROUND THE NATION AND WORLD

FLORIDA

Judge still weighing Trump trial date

Federal prosecutors pressed a federal judge Friday to schedule a trial for this summer in the classified documents case against former President Donald Trump, while defense lawyers sought to put it off until after the election.

U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon did not set a date during the pivotal hourslong hearing in Fort Pierce attended by Trump, though she did express skepticism that the case could proceed to trial on the timeline requested by prosecutors.

The trial date decision is crucial, determining whether the former president and leading Republican candidate in the 2024 presidential race faces a jury before the November election on charges that he hoarded top-secret records at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida and concealed them from government investigators.

Given the gravity of the allegations and the breadth of evidence that prosecutors say they have accumulated, the documents case has long been seen as the most legally perilous of the four criminal prosecutions that Trump is facing this year.

NEW JERSEY

Man pleads guilty to attempted bribery

A New Jersey businessman pleaded guilty Friday to trying to bribe U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez, admitting that he gave the senator's wife a car to influence him and agreeing to a deal with prosecutors that calls for him to testify in the corruption case against the powerful Democrat.

Jose Uribe, of Clifton, N.J., entered the plea in Manhattan federal court to seven charges, including conspiracy to commit bribery from 2018 to 2023, honest services wire fraud, obstruction of justice and tax evasion.

BANGLADESH

No fire exits at mall that had deadly blaze

A six-story shopping mall that caught fire in the Bangladeshi capital had no fire exits, the country's prime minister said Friday, as the death toll climbed to at least 46 and rescuers searched for more victims.

The fire started late Thursday in a restaurant on the first floor of the Green Cozy Cottage Shopping Mall in downtown Dhaka. More than a dozen firefighting units were deployed.

Health Minister Samanta Lal Sen said the death toll could rise further as at least a dozen critically injured people were being treated in two state-run hospitals.

VATICAN CITY

Flu-ridden pope has aide read his speech

Pope Francis, who has been suffering from the flu, asked an aide to read out his prepared speech at a conference in the Vatican on Friday, saying he has not yet fully recovered from his latest ailment that has raised concerns about his capacity to continue leading the Roman Catholic Church.

The 87-year-old pontiff, who was taken to a Roman hospital on Wednesday for diagnostic testing after having to cancel some public audiences, handed his speech to his aide, Mons. Filippo Ciampanelli.

From wire reports



Associated Press

Workers carry the coffin and a portrait of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny out of the Church of the Icon of the Mother of God Soothe My Sorrows on Friday in Moscow, where his funeral drew thousands of relatives and supporters.

Thousands pack Navalny funeral in Moscow

By Dasha Litvinova and Katie Marie Davies
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Under a heavy police presence, thousands of people bade farewell Friday to opposition leader Alexei Navalny at his funeral in Moscow after his still-unexplained death two weeks ago in an Arctic penal colony.

The crowds who thronged to honor Navalny outside a church and cemetery in a snowy southeastern suburb of the capital chanted slogans for him and against Russian President Vladimir Putin and the war in Ukraine, turning the event into one of the largest recent displays of dissent. But police did not act against them.

At least 67 people were detained at events across Russia in Navalny's memory, said OVD-Info, a rights group that tracks political arrests, with most stopped while trying to lay flowers at monuments dedicated to victims of Soviet repression. When his death was announced Feb. 16, police detained hundreds who tried to leave flowers.

Navalny was buried after a short Russian Orthodox ceremony, with vast crowds waiting outside the church and then streaming to the fresh grave with flowers.

Navalny's widow, Yulia, who was not seen at the funeral but has vowed to continue his work, lovingly thanked him for "26 years of absolute happiness."

"I don't know how to live without you, but I will try to do it in a way that you up there are proud of me and happy for me," she wrote on Instagram.

Navalny's 23-year-old daughter, Daria, also shared a tribute to her father.

"Ever since I was a child, you taught me to live by certain principles. To live with dignity. You gave your life for me, for mum, for (my brother) Zakhar, for Russia," she wrote on Instagram. "I promise you that I will live my life in the way that you taught me, in a way that will make you proud — and most importantly, with a smile on my face."

The funeral followed a battle with authorities over the release of his body. His team said several Moscow churches refused to hold the funeral for the man who crusaded against official corruption and organized massive protests. Many Western leaders blamed the death on the Russian leader, an accusation the Kremlin angrily rejected.

Navalny's team eventually got permission from the Church of the Icon of the Mother of God Soothe My Sorrows, which was surrounded by crowd-control barriers.

As his coffin was removed from the hearse and taken inside the church, the crowd waiting outside broke into respectful applause and then chanted: "Navalny! Navalny!" Some also shouted, "You weren't afraid, neither are we!" and later "No to war!" "Russia without Putin!" and "Russia will be free!"

After the short church service, thousands marched to the nearby Borisovskoye Cemetery, where the police were also out in force.

With the casket again open, Navalny's mother and father stroked and kissed his head. A large crowd gathered at the cemetery's gates, chanting: "Let us in to say goodbye!"

The coffin was lowered into the ground. In keeping with his irreverent sense of humor, music from the "The Terminator 2" was played, a movie his allies said he considered "the best in the world."

Mourners streamed by his open grave, tossing handfuls of soil onto the coffin as a large crowd waited at the cemetery's entrance. As dusk fell, workers shoveled dirt into the grave while Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, watched. A mound of flowers, funeral wreaths, candles and a portrait of Navalny sat nearby.

Iran's parliament vote marred by low turnout

ASSOCIATED PRESS

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iran held its first parliamentary election Friday since mass 2022 protests over mandatory hijab laws following the death of Mahsa Amini, apparently drawing a low turnout amid calls for a boycott.

It wasn't immediately clear if voter apathy or an active desire to send a message to Iran's theocracy depressed the number of voters coming to polling stations across the Islamic Republic. While state-controlled television broadcast images of lines of voters, others across the capital of Tehran saw largely empty polling stations.

Officials including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei sought to link turnout directly to taking a stand against Iran's enemies. Others, including imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi, urged a boycott of a vote they derided as a "sham."



Vahid Salemi/Associated Press

A woman casts her ballot Friday at a polling station in Tehran, Iran. Turnout was estimated at 38.5%.

Authorities broadly barred politicians calling for any change within the country's government, known broadly as reformists, from running in the election.

Of about 15,000 candidates vying for seats in the 290-member parliament, formally known as the Islamic Consultative Assembly, only 116 are considered to be relatively moderate or pro-reform candidates.

Meanwhile, Iran's economy continues to stagnate under Western sanctions over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program and the country's arming of militia proxies in the Middle East and Russia in its war on Ukraine.

Some of the voters acknowledged the challenges facing the Islamic Republic.

"There are many problems; too many problems," said one voter, who just gave her last name, Sajjad. "We are sad, we are sorrowful and we voice our criticism as much as we can. God willing, those responsible will start thinking about us, and probably many of them do care."

State-owned polling center ISPA predicted a turnout of 38.5%. It said the margin of error in the poll was 2%. That could put turnout on track to be its lowest ever. The lowest previous came in the last parliamentary election in 2020, which saw a 42% turnout.

The boycott calls have put the government under renewed pressure — since its 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's theocracy has based its legitimacy in part on turnout in elections.

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CDC: No need to isolate 5 days for COVID

By Julian Gill and Evan MacDonald
STAFF WRITERS

U.S. health officials announced Friday that Americans who test positive for COVID-19 no longer need to isolate for at least five days.

The updated guidelines say people can return to work and their normal activities if their symptoms are improving and it's been at least 24 hours since they've had a fever. They should still consider wearing a face mask and keeping a distance from others for five days after resuming normal activities, according to guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Americans are not required to test negative for COVID-19 before ending their isolation. Data has shown that many Americans aren't testing anyway, health officials said.

"They're recognizing that a lot of people have moved on," said Dr. Luis Ostrosky, chief of infectious diseases and epidemiology with UTHealth Houston and Memorial Hermann. COVID also doesn't pose the same threat it once did, he added.

The nation is seeing far fewer hospitalizations and deaths related to COVID-19 than at the height of the pandemic. Many Americans have at least some level of immunity from COVID-19 vaccines or a prior infection. There are also more tools, such as medications like Paxlovid, to help reduce the risk of severe illness.

"Today's announcement reflects the progress we have made in protecting against severe illness from COVID-19," CDC Director Dr. Mandy Cohen said in a statement. "However, we still must use the commonsense solutions we know work to protect ourselves and others from serious illness from respiratory viruses — this includes vaccination, treatment, and staying home when we get sick."

The guidelines note that states and other countries that have already shortened their recommended isolation times have not seen a spike in hospitalizations and deaths related to COVID-19.

The new guidelines come as Texas is experiencing "high" levels of respiratory illness, according to the latest data from the CDC. But Houston Methodist's online tracker shows that COVID-19 cases have decreased over the last month. Flu cases have also decreased, while RSV cases have remained relatively flat.

The JN.1 variant of the coronavirus now accounts for more than 90% of COVID-19 cases nationwide, according to the latest CDC data. Experts have said the JN.1 variant does not appear to cause as much severe illness as prior variants.

The new guidelines also apply to other respiratory viruses, including the flu and respiratory syncytial virus. The CDC said the change results in a "unified approach" to respiratory viruses, which should make it easier for Americans to follow the guidelines.

Ostrosky said he has mixed feelings about the change.

"It recognizes where we are in the pandemic," he said. "On the other hand, COVID is a lethal disease, and it's in the top 10 causes of death in the United States. It would be preventable if we were more careful."

Americans are still advised to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Those include staying up to date with vaccinations and practicing good hygiene by washing your hands and covering coughs and sneezes.

The CDC earlier this week recommended an additional vaccine dose for older adults over 65, because protection from the last dose has likely waned. The vaccines tend to lose some effectiveness after about four months, said Dr. Robert Atmar, a professor of infectious diseases at Baylor College of Medicine.

Even with the new isolation guidance, additional precautions should still be taken around individuals over 65 years old and those with weakened immune systems.

"The bottom line is that when people follow these actionable recommendations to avoid getting sick, and to protect themselves and others if they do get sick, it will help limit the spread of respiratory viruses, and that will mean fewer people who experience severe illness," Dr. Demetre Daskalakis, the director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, said in the statement.

PRIMARIES

From page A1

ty and offered Democratic voters in those districts a rare dose of competition — particularly where the two seats overlap in northwest Houston and unincorporated parts of north Harris County.

The effects have even rippled into a local House district, represented by Democrat Jarvis Johnson, who is running to succeed Whitmire instead of seeking reelection to the lower chamber. That seat, too, has seen turnover only once since the 1980s: when Johnson replaced 27-year incumbent Sylvester Turner upon Turner's elevation to mayor in 2016.

That means thousands of voters north of the Loop and between U.S. 290 and Interstate 45, a Democratic stronghold that includes Acres Homes and Oak Forest, will pick new representation in both chambers of the Legislature this year, while also helping decide a barn burner between their longtime representative in Congress and her former intern-turned-political rival.



Jasper Scherer/Staff

Democratic state Rep. Jarvis Johnson, who is seeking the Texas Senate seat formerly held by John Whitmire, chats with potential voters while block-walking on Feb. 24 in the Heights.

Low turnout

Even with an onslaught of campaign mail and yard signs peppering the districts, few voters appear to be seizing the opportunity. With early voting ending Friday in the primaries — the contests that will effectively decide who represents the three heavily Democratic districts — just 166,000 voters had turned out for either party's primary across Harris County through Thursday, or around 6% of more than 2.6 million registered voters.

In Jackson Lee's congressional district, nearly 24,000 people had voted in the Democratic or Republican primary, out of nearly 410,000 registered voters, resulting in a turnout of about 6%.

"I think the general vibe is a little down," said Molly Cook, an emergency room nurse and one of six Democrats running to succeed Whitmire. "I think everybody kind of feels that."

The stakes are high in all three primaries because it can be hard to uproot incumbents once they're in office.

Whitmire was first elected to the Senate in 1982. When he defeated Cook two years ago by about 17 percentage points, it was his narrowest win since the early 1990s. Jackson Lee, meanwhile, went without a primary challenger in 10 of her 14 reelection bids before this year — suggesting Edwards, 42, could keep a similarly durable grasp on the seat if she wins Tuesday.

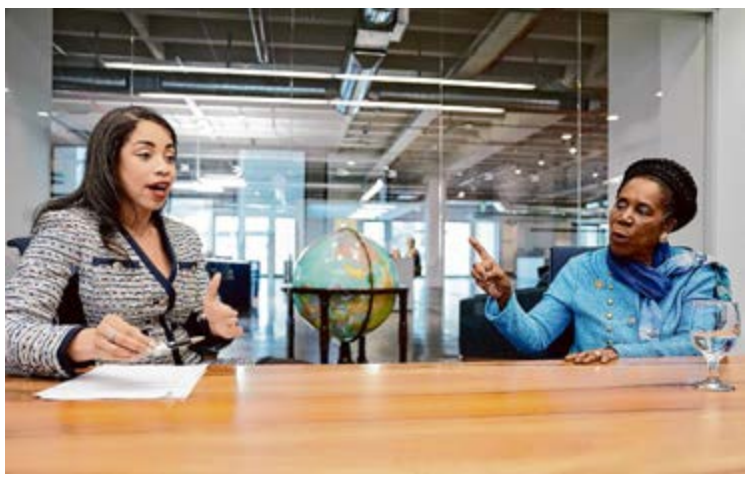
"In Texas, particularly in the Democratic Party, there's a tremendous incumbency advantage," said Mark Jones, a political scientist at Rice University. "Elected officials tend to support other elected officials, and the Austin lobby and big donors tend to support the incumbents."

But with little intrigue atop the ticket — aside from a sleepy race to decide who will take on U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz — down-ballot candidates are left to whip up most of the turnout on their own. That can feel like an uphill battle with an electorate that is more attuned to the November presidential election than the relatively obscure legislative races taking place barely two months after New Year's.



Melissa Phillip/Staff file photo

State Senate candidate Todd Litton ran for Congress in 2018.



Elizabeth Conley/Staff photographer

Former City Council Member Amanda Edwards, left, is challenging U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee. They appeared before the Houston Chronicle Editorial Board in January.

Cook got a flavor of this on a recent round of block-walking through Acres Homes, when she encountered several people hanging outside the Grab & GO convenience store on De Priest Street. As she distributed her campaign literature to the prospective voters, Cook asked if anyone planned to vote in the primary.

A few seconds of silence passed. One person said no, another responded by complimenting her tattoo. A third asked Cook if she was "going for Joe Biden again?"

"I'm going for Molly Cook for Texas Senate, that's what I'm going for," she answered with a laugh.

In Jackson Lee's primary, Jones said, some less engaged voters may be wondering, after two rounds of mayoral voting, why they are being asked to vote for her for the third time in four months.

"What tends to happen in these low-turnout elections is, the campaigns go for the low-hanging fruit — the people with a history of voting in party primaries," Jones said.

Many of those are "hard-core voters" who turned out for the mayoral election and are going to vote "rain or shine, regardless of what's going on," he added. "But there's probably some fatigue among other voters who say, 'Didn't I do this once in November, once in December already?'"

The race to succeed Whitmire is all but certain to head to a May runoff between the top two finishers. With the vote divided among six candidates, nobody is expected to reach the majority needed to win Tuesday's election outright. The Democratic primary to replace Johnson offers a similar outlook, with five Democratic hopefuls.

Turnout can be especially paltry in House and Senate primary runoffs. In May 2016, when Johnson won the nomination for his first full House term, about 2,900 people turned out — 3.2% of the district's registered voters.



Lawyer Beto Cardenas and charter school leader Michelle Bonton are also vying in the Texas Senate District 15 race.

'I've got the skill set'

In Whitmire's old district, the Democratic candidates have focused on a similar slate of liberal priorities, led by abortion rights and pumping more money into the state's beleaguered public education system.

The only public polling on the race has shown Cook and Johnson tied atop the field with 18% support. Todd Litton, an attorney-mediator who ran for Congress against Dan Crenshaw in 2018, narrowly trailed with 14%.

Three other candidates — attorney Beto Cardenas, renewable energy developer Karthik Soora and charter school leader Michelle Bonton — each trailed with 6% or less.

Johnson argued that his experience in Austin sets him apart from a field with few ideological disparities.

"This is not the time to have people training in the Senate to try to figure out what politics is all about," he said. "Unfortunately, none of my opponents have ever worked one day in somebody's (legislative) office, let alone been an elected official and had relationships."

Cook said she sees that as "a little bit of a tired argument." In a nod to her medical background, which she has also emphasized in her campaign ads, Cook said the Senate should look like "a healthy nursing unit," with a mix of new, midlevel and experienced nurses.

"Experienced nurses can train young nurses," Cook said. "They also may be a little set in their ways and tend to cut some corners over time."

She argued that she is well versed in the legislative process too, pointing to a new law she advocated for last year that cracks down on a loophole certain corporations use to secure tax breaks on market-rate apartment units.

Litton said his experience resolving disputes as a mediator — along with leading various nonprofits and working in investments — would help him "connect with people who see things differently" in a Senate dominated by Republicans.

"It's like, how do you look at problems and try to reach solutions and bring people to table and look at it in different ways?" Litton said. "I think I've got the skill set and experience that can help us get there."

Johnson, who has not shied from speaking his mind on the House floor, said it's "crazy town" in the Senate under its leader, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, and "you've got to bring a strong voice" to fight back. He argued that it's possible to take that approach while also being "open and honest" so that Patrick and other Republicans know what they're getting.

"I believe in decorum. I believe in being respectful," Johnson said. "But it comes a point where you can't be rational with irrational people. I can't have decorum and call you sir, when you're calling me out by name. And I'm gonna bring that heat if you bring that funk."

Beyond the candidates' backgrounds, voters are also likely to weigh factors like race, ethnicity and gender when they head to the polls.

In the Senate primary poll, Johnson dominated among Black voters with 43% support, more than the others combined. Jones said Johnson would be aided by the overlapping congressional primary, in which Edwards and Jackson Lee are both looking to turn out their own bases of Black voters.

Cardenas, meanwhile, is the only Latino candidate in a district where about 28% of the voting-age population is Hispanic, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. In the primary poll, however, Jones and co-author Renée Cross, senior executive director of the University of Houston's Hobby School of Public Affairs, estimated that Latino voters would make up about 15% of the Democratic primary electorate.

Soora, a former chemistry teacher and the son of Indian immigrants, has noted that he would be the first Indian American — and the first member of the broader Asian American and Pacific Islander community — to serve in the Texas Senate.

Cook is helped, Jones said, by being "the only viable woman in the race with an electorate that is somewhere between 57% and 60% female."

Some of Litton's strongest support in the poll came from older white voters, and "it's not clear if he can turn out enough of them in order to get elected," Jones said.

Litton said he's not concerned about his status as the only white male in the race. He has touted his endorsements from the Harris County Tejano Democrats and the Harris County chapter of the Texas Coalition of Black Democrats

"The work is to represent every person in the district," Litton said. "Hopefully people will see and understand that I'm serious about that."

Matt Zdun contributed to this report.

LUNAR LANDER

From page A1

Aldrin. "If my dad landed on the side of the lunar lander, that would be pretty bad."

Proven technologies

The Nova-C lander launched Feb. 15 atop a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket at NASA's Kennedy Space Center.

After separating from the rocket, Nova-C became the first spacecraft to ignite an engine in deep space with an increasingly popular propellant: liquid methane and liquid oxygen.

The company also demonstrated its ability to navigate a spacecraft to the moon, enter lunar orbit and land within roughly 1 mile of its intended destination.

"We've proven that we can now repeat each of those things with confidence," said Philip Metzger, director of the Stephen W. Hawking Center for Microgravity Research and Education at the University of Central Florida. "We've bought down the risk."

The mission also showcased an adaptable team that overcame 11 critical mission challenges.

A particularly big issue was Intuitive Machines' inability to turn on lasers meant to help the spacecraft land by gauging speed, direction and altitude. A safety feature meant to keep the powerful lasers from harming workers wasn't disabled before liftoff, meaning the technology could not be deployed in space.

Metzger has worked with similar lasers and said they could blind people if accidentally turned on while the spacecraft was being prepared for launch.

Intuitive Machines CEO Steve Altemus said "a couple of people beat themselves up pretty bad" over the mistake. "But the fact that we were able to land softly using optical measurements is just a breakthrough in the performance of this vehicle."

Instead of using the lasers — and after trying to use an alternate set on NASA equipment flying onboard — the spacecraft autonomously landed using pictures its flight computer took while descending. Comparing two images in rapid succession helped the lander measure velocity but not distance or altitude.

It's a misstep the company will likely never repeat, and McDowell cautioned against judging Intuitive Machines too harshly. Rocket science has some really hard tasks — and many easy ones that all must be done correctly.

"The thing that's really hard, you throw 20 engineers at and you do it perfectly," McDowell said. "The thing that you think is obvious is the thing that gets overlooked because there are hundreds of them."



Raquel Natalicchio/Staff photographer

Intuitive Machines workers in Houston cheer after the Nova-C landing. The science community has largely praised the company for reaching the moon and showcasing new capabilities.

Sticking the landing

The spacecraft, named Odysseus, landed while moving roughly 6 mph vertically and 2 mph horizontally. It skidded and sat upright for a bit as the engine continued to fire. Then some of the landing gear broke, and the lander tipped over. It came to rest at an angle, elevated by its helium tank or radio shelf.

It was the second lander to topple this year. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's SLIM spacecraft was designed to land and then fall 90 degrees — but it kept rolling and came to rest upside-down.

It's an issue engineers must overcome.

"Ending up on your side, it's not a success," Aldrin said. "The fact that they got there is great, and so this is a great step forward. But no, it's not an unqualified success."

The recent topplings have spurred a debate over whether landers should be low and squatty — like robotic probes launched to the moon in the '60s — rather than tall and slender like the Nova-C, which is roughly the size of an old British telephone box. It's easier to tip over on the moon because there isn't as much gravity to weigh items down.

"There's an arrogance of technologists that they can overcome anything in computing power and software," said Greg Autry, director of Arizona State University's Thunderbird Initiative for Space Leadership, Policy and Business. "And I question that."

Others, however, argued that the landers should be able to remain upright.

"There's no excuse why we can't build a robot that can be tall and still land without falling over," Metzger said. "If it gives us more capability on the moon, then we should be going for it. I don't think we need to be so conservative that we build everything short and squatty."

Beaming back data

Communications were hindered by Odysseus' awkward landing. The antenna designed to send and receive data more quickly was not pointed in the right direction, so Intuitive Machines had to rely on less powerful antennas.

The team eventually determined the antennas provided roughly 16 hours each day when the team could only monitor the spacecraft's health and send basic commands. The lander then had eight hours to send back science and engineering data as the moon passed over Australia, which has a very large and sensitive radio telescope capable of picking up the spacecraft's signal.

Despite the limitation, Altemus said the company received data from all of its NASA and commercial payloads.

Some were more successful than others.

Each of NASA's six payloads met at least some of their objectives, said Sue Lederer, a project scientist with NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services initiative.

She said two of the navigation-related payloads, meant to be technology demonstrations, were actually called upon as NASA worked with Intuitive Machines to get to the lunar surface. Another NASA payload had a hardware issue that prevented it from collecting data during landing. It had hoped to study the plume of dust kicked up by the engine.

On the commercial side, Lonestar Data Holdings successfully tested its lunar data storage system, transmitting the U.S. Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights back and forth to the lander.

EagleCam, made by private university Embry-Riddle, was supposed to eject from Odysseus before it landed to capture images of the touchdown. The effort was abandoned when Intuitive Machines struggled with its lasers. The payload was later ejected, but it did not capture images of the spacecraft.

The International Lunar Observatory Association received high-resolution images of the moon's horizon, Odysseus and the sun — but not the Milky Way galaxy as the association had hoped.

Steve Durst, director of the Hawaii-based association, said he was happy with the mission overall. It proved the association's technology works in space, and it raised awareness for the group's bigger goal of building the ILO-1, a permanent observatory on the moon.

"Our instruments are on the moon," Durst said. "They're not facing the direction we were hoping, but the wide field of view has captured some great data."

The sun stopped hitting the lander's solar panels Thursday. Odysseus depleted its power and shut down just before 2 p.m. It was not designed to survive the cold lunar night, but Intuitive Machines hopes it will reawaken when sunlight returns in two or three weeks.

Moon economics

Ultimately, Altemus said the company met its high-level objectives of softly landing on the moon, returning scientific data and testing the performance of its spacecraft.

"In our mind, this is an unqualified success," Altemus said. "We've fundamentally changed the economics of landing on the moon, and we've kicked open the door for a robust, thriving cislunar economy in the future."

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson also called the mission a success.

The landing marked a major milestone for the agency's Commercial Lunar Payload Services initiative, which provided funding and guidance for the IM-1 mission. NASA hopes riding on commercial landers will help the agency send more experiments to the moon for less money.

The Intuitive Machines mission cost about $130 million. NASA contributed $118 million, and Intuitive Machines and its other commercial customers contributed the rest.

"I think the fact that we made a credible attempt at landing something on the moon for around $100 million is pretty impressive compared to what things would cost typically," Aldrin said. "That in itself is successful."

Aldrin, however, worries that the contract structure is putting too much financial risk on companies. He'd like to see more flexibility in the way the government provides funding — though Altemus praised the program's constraints for spurring innovation.

"Innovation came from being absolutely over-constrained, where you didn't have enough time. You didn't have enough money, and you were trying to tackle a problem that seemed almost intractable," Altemus said.

The NASA initiative was created knowing that not all of its early missions would be completely successful. Its first moon lander to launch, made by Astrobotic Technology, had a propulsion issue that prevented it from reaching the moon.

Autry, of Arizona State's Thunderbird Initiative, hopes that NASA and the investment community maintain their tolerance for failure as they work to develop a lunar economy.

McDowell, with the Center for Astrophysics, said that "the CLPs program is delivering. What's important right now is not the amount of science data IM-1 delivered, but that the program is delivering an industry that is capable of delivering lots of data in the future."

HOUSE RACE

From page A1

eral voting record and support for Democrats."

The race hinges on whether Woodfill — with his record of controversial advocacy work and his long-standing work relationship with conservative activist Steven Hotze — can convince enough GOP voters that he is a better choice than Hull, who is vying for a third term. Woodfill is a career bomb-thrower, often fighting members of his own party to advance a far-right agenda, while Hull has pitched herself as a lawmaker open to working with others to get legislation across the finish line.

Neither candidate responded to requests for comment. Early voting ended Friday, and election day is March 5.

Hull is touting a list of conservative achievements while in office, including her votes to ban abortion, prevent transgender student-athletes from competing in women's sports and cut property taxes. She has mostly ignored Woodfill's attacks, instead flooding her social media with posts about her endorsements and pictures from the campaign trail.

In a recent post touting her endorsement from the Texas Liberty Alliance, a conservative PAC in Harris County, Hull wrote: "I'm proud to be endorsed by the @TLA_PAC for re-election as State Representative, in recognition of my steadfast commitment to the sanctity of life, personal liberty, the 2nd Amendment and border security. I look forward to continuing to defend these conservative values in the Texas House!"

Still, Hull's district has been inundated with attack ads, including a widely criticized anti-Muslim mailer that falsely claimed Hull was trying to bring "Sharia law" to Texas. Another ad sought to link Hull to former U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, suggesting Hull voted to raise her own pension. The mailers are all linked back to the same far-right donors who have backed Woodfill's campaign.

Hull currently has about $231,000 in her campaign coffers, according to new campaign finance reports filed this week. Her biggest donors include Phelan's campaign, Gov. Greg Abbott and the Texas Sands PAC, which advocates for legalizing casino gambling. Woodfill has just over $100 currently. The bulk of his funds came from Hotze, who loaned Woodfill's campaign $25,000. Woodfill has also loaned himself money.

Their race is one of several intraparty fights that will test the influence Paxton and other state leaders have in GOP primaries. The attorney general, who has promised retribution against anyone who tried to oust him from office, has backed Woodfill, as has Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller and Texas GOP Chair Matt Rinaldi.

Hull has Abbott's support this cycle, and he's made personal visits to her district to campaign for her reelection. Abbott, separately, is trying to oust incumbent members of the House Republican Caucus who voted against his priority private school voucher plan. Hull supports vouchers.

Woodfill is no stranger to the public eye, and he's most recently known for the lawsuits he and Hotze filed to challenge stay-at-home orders during the COVID-19 pandemic and to throw out a gag order Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick issued during the Senate's impeachment trial of Paxton.

The lawyer served as chair of the Harris County GOP from 2002 to 2014. Members replaced him that year for his divisive rhetoric and, some say, stalled outreach and fundraising efforts.

After he left that leadership role, Woodfill and Hotze in 2015 worked together to defeat a local ordinance that would have expanded equal rights protections to LGBTQ Texans. Both have helped promote the false rhetoric that LGBTQ people are "groomers."

Woodfill has also been caught up in the sex abuse scandals plaguing the Southern Baptist Convention. The Texas Tribune reported last year that Woodfill had known since 2004 that his law partner, who was also a Southern Baptist leader, was accused of sexually abusing a minor. Still, Woodfill continued working with him and sending young people his way, the Tribune reported. Woodfill has denied all wrongdoing.

The Harris County District Attorney's Office raided Woodfill's office in 2018, accusing him of stealing thousands of dollars from former clients. A recent Houston Chronicle investigation found District Attorney Kim Ogg gave conflicting reasons for why the case was quietly dropped.

Woodfill's lawyer, Terry Yates, called the allegations against his client "very old news" that "has resurfaced as fodder for a political hatchet job to try and influence political voters."

Hull, before joining the Legislature, worked in the nonprofit sector and now works as an analyst consultant for a Lubbock-based property management company, according to her most recently filed personal financial disclosure. She has been vocal on issues involving health care, parental rights and law enforcement, and she serves on three Texas House committees — Human Services, Insurance and Local & Consent Calendars.

In 2021, Hull led the effort to pass "John and Joseph's Law," which intends to help identify missing persons. She was reelected in 2022 by about 14 percentage points.

Neena Satija and Andrea Ball contributed to this report.

FIREFIGHTERS

From page A1

ton deserves a well-funded fire department to attract and retain talented individuals who are willing to risk their safety for us during our times of need," Whitmire said in a statement. "This agreement resolves a long-festering pay dispute with firefighters, avoids further unnecessary litigation costs, and allows us to move forward together."

The Whitmire administration has aimed to resolve the dispute and create a plan to finance eight years of back pay — estimated to cost hundreds of millions of dollars — by the end of February. City Attorney Arturo Michel said it could take an additional two to three months to finalize the agreement and clarify the finance plan.

Paying for the agreement will likely require a combination of the city's general fund dollars and new debt, which could require either a judge's approval or a voter referendum, Michel said. In his announcement, Whitmire called on all Houstonians to support efforts to fund public safety operations.

"I will ask City Council members and all Houstonians to support this arrangement once final details are settled with our partners at the Houston Professional Fire Fighters Association," Whitmire said.

Union President Marty Lancton praised Whitmire for the progress, contrasting the new mayor's swift action with what he described as the "inaction" of Turner's administration.

"To say the last eight years have been an unrelenting nightmare for Houston firefighters, their families and Local 341 is an understatement," Lancton said. "In just seven weeks, we have resolved a dispute the previous administration kicked down the road for eight years."

Turner was able to work around the lack of contract and give firefighters a three-year, 18% pay raise in 2021. But the salary increases were never formalized in a contract.

The former mayor repeatedly warned of the fiscal consequences of additional pay raises. As federal COVID-19 relief dollars are set to dry up, officials have forecast deficits between $114 million and $264 million during Whitmire's first term.

A trial date is currently set for March 25 to address the contract impasse from 2017. Whitmire's office said the administration will reveal the next steps in negotiations in an upcoming announcement.



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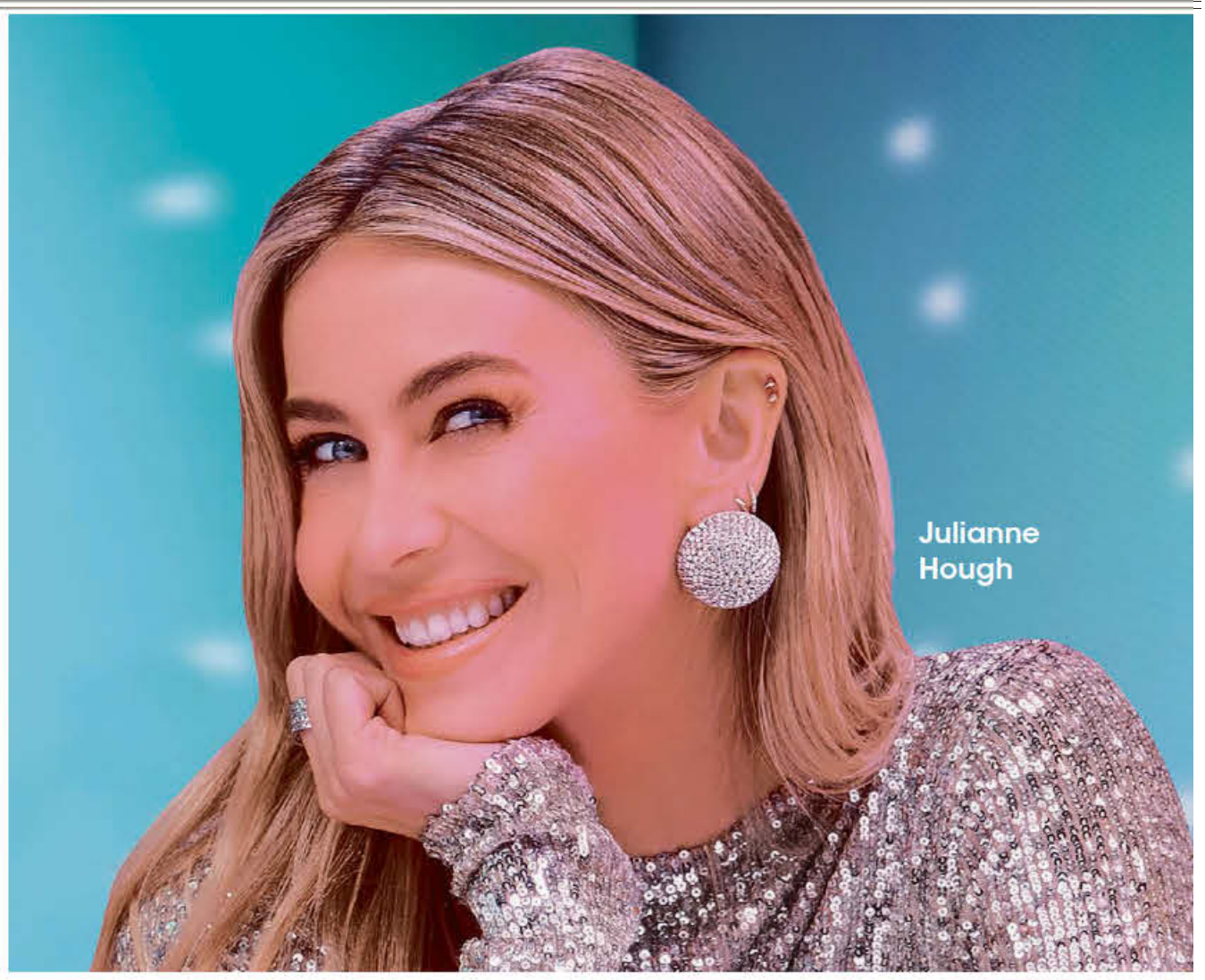
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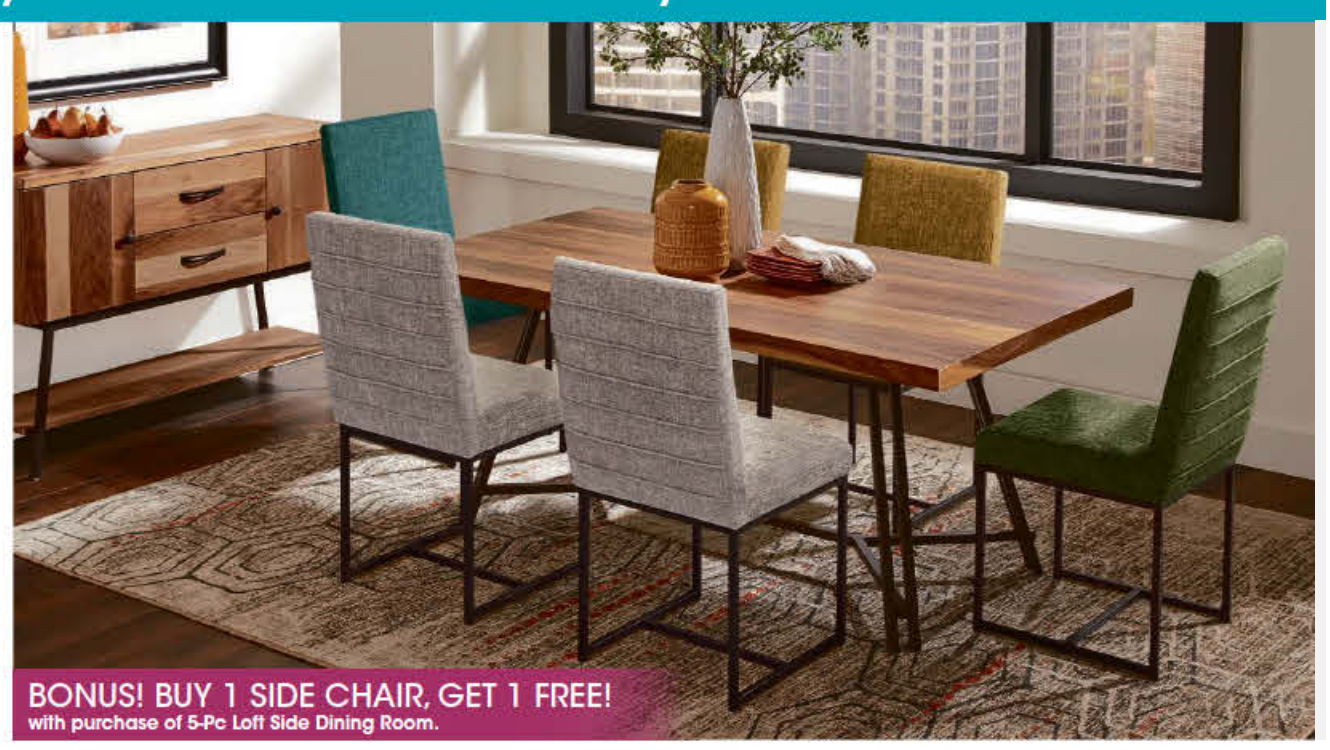
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OPINION

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EDITORIAL

Thumbs: Paxton, Cornyn trade slams

The 2024 election season isn't even close to over, but the knives are already out for 2026 in the civil war between Texas Republicans. When John Cornyn put his name forward to succeed Mitch McConnell as the Republican leader of the U.S. Senate, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton didn't offer words of encouragement. Instead, the indicted attorney general who is also under investigation for corruption alleged by his own former aides posted to social media that Cornyn is "anti-Trump, anti-gun," and apparently alluding to his own hinted run for Cornyn's Senate seat, Paxton noted that Cornyn would surely "be focused on his highly competitive primary campaign in 2026." Texas' senior senator didn't bother correcting Paxton on the facts, but we will: Cornyn has endorsed Trump and passing a bill that keeps even more convicted domestic abusers from owning guns isn't anti-gun; it's anti-murder. As for Cornyn, typically mild mannered and collaborative, he simply replied, "Hard to run from prison, Ken."

Trump courts Abbott; Ogg slams Soros money; hot February

Apparently, though, it's not hard at all to run for U.S. Senate leader from the Texas governor's mansion. Cornyn could face some stiff competition to replace McConnell from none other than Gov. Greg Abbott. Wait, what? That's what we were asking when former President Donald Trump mentioned the startling prospect during this Thursday campaign stop in Eagle Pass. When the 77-year-old wasn't heaping praise on Abbott's "military operation" on the border and doubling down on his migrant invasion crime wave theory, he was pumping up speculation on Abbott's political prospects, telling Sean Hannity on Fox News at one point that Abbott was on his short list for vice president. Abbott demurred, saying his focus was "entirely on the state of Texas." Cue the awkward laughs of a bad romantic comedy. But later, according to the Texas Tribune, Trump suggested that Abbott could somehow replace McConnell as Senate leader. Again, Abbott insisted, "I'd rather be governor of Texas." In true Trump fashion, he quickly made it seem like that was his aim all along: "I want to keep you in Texas," he said. And the date ended with no one accepting a rose.

Harris County Democrats have been putting on their own nonsensical show ahead of the Tuesday primaries. District Attorney Kim Ogg slammed her opponent Sean Teare for accepting money from a political action committee funded by (gasp!) billionaire George Soros. How could he? What was he thinking? Um, maybe the same thing Ogg herself was thinking when she received $500,000 from Soros in 2016. Typically, Soros money isn't a deal-breaker or even a conversation piece in a Democratic primary; the bogeyman mystique of the Jewish philanthropist is regarded as far more persuasive among conspiracy theory crowds who revel in antisemitic tropes and white supremacist dog whistles. Ogg's criticism, to be sure, doesn't invoke such tropes. She put out a press release quoting Douglas Griffith, the Houston Police Officers Union president, saying "big-city DAs funded by Soros have been a disaster for the communities they represent." It's never good to generalize.

We've all heard the saying — if you don't like the weather in Texas, just wait a few minutes. That was surely no consolation this week for the folks in Killeen and nearby Fort Cavazos, who saw their beautiful, temperate, sweater-friendly February transformed into a blistering, 100-degree scorcher before they could even alert the furnace of the change in plans. The San Antonio Express-News reported that Killeen wasn't just the first city in Texas to reach 100 degrees this year, it was the first in the nation. Meteorologists have their fancy scientific explanations about why this happened in Central Texas as opposed to the more likely Desert Southwest. And climate change may indeed have played a role. But we think it was also just this crazy weather state trying to keep us on our toes. All Texans know better than to mess with Texas. But it sure does enjoy messing with us.

Are we in the midst of a University of Houston basketball renaissance? For the third year in a row, the plucky Cougars appear poised to cut down a few nets in the upcoming NCAA tournament. Behind a tenacious, suffocating defense, Kelvin Sampson's team has climbed to the No. 1 ranking, ahead of stalwart hoops powerhouses such as Connecticut, North Carolina and Duke. The Cougars' success is all the more impressive considering that two of Sampson's top bench players are sidelined for the season with injuries. While star guards Jamal Shead, L.J. Cryer and bruising forward J'Wan Roberts form a fearsome triumvirate, the strength of the Cougars is their "next man up" mentality. Even with two key reserves out for the season with injuries and Roberts battling knee problems, the Cougars were able to grind out a gritty win over Cincinnati this week for their sixth straight victory. That depth should serve them well during March Madness, when the travel, national spotlight and elite competition can be grueling. Who knows? Maybe these Coogs can break through to the Final Four for the second time in three years and bring a national championship trophy home. We'll have our brackets filled out accordingly.



Anna Moneymaker/Tribune Nwes Service

U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, has calmly fired back at Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton on social media.



OPINON

Social media must pick a lane

By Matt Bai

The case brought by tech companies that reached the Supreme Court this week might involve a lot of complicated legalese, but it actually hinges on a simple, unsettled question — one that will define how we treat social media platforms for decades to come.

Have Facebook and X, formerly Twitter, now become the modern equivalent of public utilities, like your phone service or electric company? Or are they media organizations like the Post?

This is the crux of the conundrum facing the justices. The case stems from harebrained laws passed by the Florida and Texas legislatures (try to contain your surprise), which barred social media platforms from kicking conservative firebrands off their sites. Texas holds that the tech companies are 21st-century utilities that have to be regulated to ensure equal access.

Industry groups funded by Big Tech, meanwhile, have sued to invalidate the law, claiming that they have the same First Amendment rights as any other media company — including the right (if not the responsibility) to decide which content is in the public interest and which isn't.

The debate here has been a long time coming. It remains unresolved, in part, because the tech companies themselves have always tried to have it both ways.

When outraged leftists demand more regulation around content that spreads hatred or misinformation, the companies are quick to assert that they are essentially pipelines for public discourse, rather than content providers. In fact, Congress codified this argument with something called Section 230, a provision that shields social media companies from the same kind of legal jeopardy that a newspaper might face for printing something false.

But when the right tries to impose some version of political neutrality, as it did in Texas, the same companies embrace exactly the opposite conceit — that they are media companies, no different from any news site, and thus can't be forced to publish content they find offensive.

If they can't decide which kind of company they really are, it's now up to the justices to decide for them, I guess.

Writing in the New York Times this week, Tim Wu — a left-leaning law professor at Columbia University and much more of an expert than I am in all of this — argued that the court should uphold the Texas law and treat the tech companies as though they were utilities.

Wu doesn't like the law itself, but striking it down, he says, would effectively bar any kind of government regulation of social media platforms, under the theory that there's no difference, constitutionally speaking, between editors at CNN and an algorithm at Instagram.

I have some sympathy for this argument, in part because I've worked for two of these companies in my career. (I spent five years as the national political columnist for Yahoo and then published a newsletter on Meta's now-defunct Bulletin platform.) I can attest to the idea that tech companies behave nothing like traditional journalism outlets. They're run by engineers who might as well be wiring your house for cable or fixing your water main for all they care about the quality of information you consume online.

And yet, as a nonlawyer, I ultimately come down on the other side of the argument — that social media companies really aren't utilities at all. They maintain no infrastructures of their own — no pipes or towers. They provide no service that we can't live without — nothing as basic as drinking water or electric lights. They require no government license to operate. Most important, they enjoy no monopoly, however much it may feel that way in the moment.

Twenty-five years ago, AOL was a behemoth of email and message boards; now it's as much a relic as dial-up internet. There's nothing stopping anyone from creating a new social media platform, and there's every reason to think that Facebook or X — or even Google, in the coming age of artificial intelligence — will be surpassed by some product yet to be invented.

In truth, these tech companies are now content providers who make editorial decisions every day about which posts to promote and which to bury. They are purveyors and aggregators of speech, and it seems to me that they have to be entitled to the same free speech protections as any other kind of media.

But here's the catch: They ought to be just as accountable for their content, too. Which is why, if the Texas law is in fact unconstitutional, then Section 230 — which was adopted almost 30 years ago now, when the internet was in its infancy — should be thrown out as well, or at least revised. The way to police social media companies is to make them liable for the damage they cause.

That doesn't mean you should be able to successfully sue a tech company for every dumb post that has harmful or even tragic consequences. It means that social media sites should be held to a minimum standard of care. To use the language of libel law, any company that exhibits "reckless disregard" for the accuracy of its content should be on the hook for the cost of making it right.

Wherever one falls in this debate, however, it's time for the tech companies to choose a lane — or to have one chosen for them. If you're a public utility, then you're answerable to government regulations. If you're a media company, then you're answerable to the courts.

What you can't be is both things at once, and answerable to nothing.

Matt Bai, a Washington Post contributing columnist, is a journalist, author and screenwriter. He spent more than a decade at the New York Times, where he was chief political writer for the Sunday magazine and a columnist for the newspaper.

BIBLE VERSE

How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!

Proverbs 16:16

SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Viewpoints c/o Houston Chronicle, 4747 Southwest Freeway, Houston, Texas, 77027 or viewpoints@chron.com. We welcome and encourage letters and emails from readers. Letters must include name, address and telephone numbers for verification purposes only. All letters are subject to editing.

WORD SLEUTH

Find the listed words in the diagram. They run in all directions – forward, backward, up, down and diagonally. ©2024 *King Features Syndicate Inc.*

Friday's unlisted clue: **CURIOUS.**
Saturday's unlisted clue hint: **YOU'RE – I'M RIGHT.**

Whole
Wrangle
Wrap
Wreath
Wrecker
Wren
Wrestle
Wretch
Wriggle
Wrinkle
Wrist
Write
Writs
Wrote
Wrought

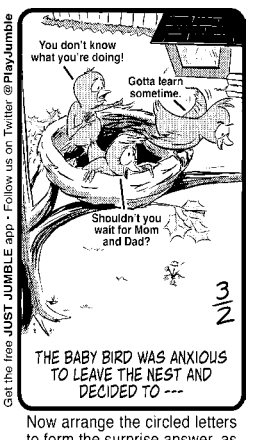
SILENT "W" WORDS

A D A X U R O L J G D A X V S
P N K I F W C A X V S Q O L J
H E C A X R V T R P N L J H F
D B Y X V E T E W H T E E R P
O M K I G C L H C R E L L D B
Z X W U T K R T G Q E G G O E
N L J I N E E A S U T N G T G
F D C I A R L E T E O A I S Y
X W R V W T O R I S R R R I R
P W O N L K H W R J W W W R I
G F G N O R W E W C P A R W B

JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

OTRGU
WLEEJ
TKTIEN
STIFIM



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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Ans. here: ( ) ( ) ( )

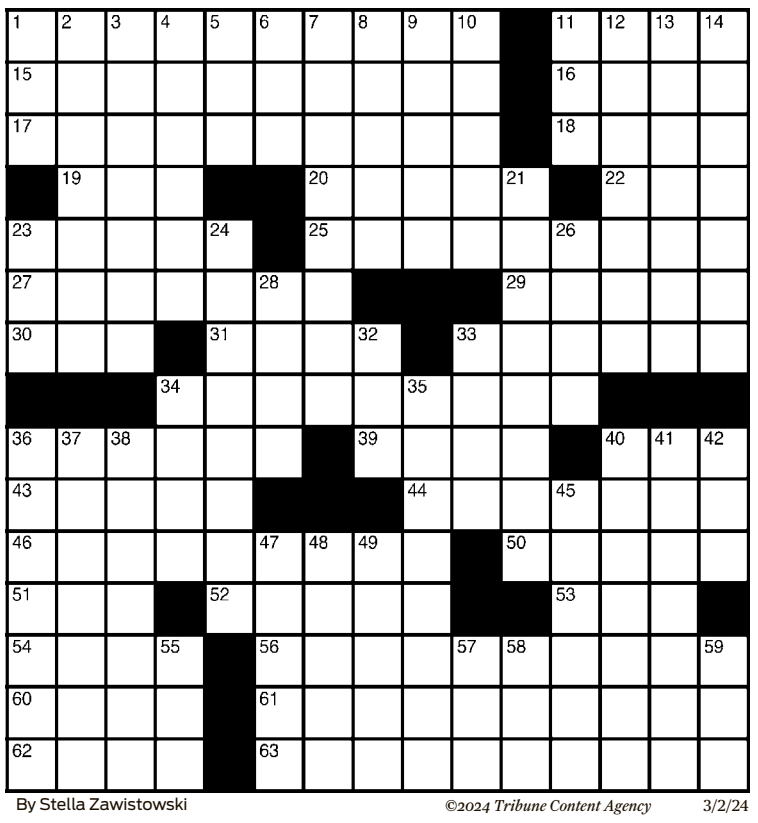
(Answers Monday)

Yesterday's Jumbles: LASSO MODEM CURFEW SEESAW
Answer: The locust who had gotten lost was now back and enjoying his — "SWARM" WELCOME

DAILY CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Unplanned adoption
11 Adoption org.
15 Intended to prevent a torrent, perhaps
16 Name on the highest-grossing concert film in history
17 Certain Central American
18 Natural traps
19 Olympic badminton team, e.g.
20 Victor Hugo's world
22 Sea bream, in a sushi bar
23 Sushi bar list
25 Snooty creatures?
27 Divine
29 "Awesome!"
30 "Awesome!"
31 Cheer (up)
33 Working days?
34 Practitioner of traditional medicine
36 Burlesque
39 Smallest ratite
40 Elle King's "Ex's & __"
43 Subject of the 2014 documentary "Game Over"
44 Jam
46 Get rich
50 Melancholy work
51 Salt target
52 Levi's Stadium player
53 Word with Days and Holiday
54 Well-thought-out
56 "Hubba hubba!"
60 Let out
61 Feature of non-eco-friendly containers
62 Syllables in Rihanna's "What's My Name?"
63 Moved mindfully?

DOWN
1 Scale tones
2 Rashly
3 Name on some church-run hospitals
4 Saved to watch later
5 Org. that regulates HFCs
6 Free (of)
7 Step one
8 Noted New York Judge
9 "It's all too much"
10 Paul of "Hollywood Squares"
11 Compete on "Project Runway," say
12 Many a fan of "The Baby-Sitters Club"
13 "Willkommen" musical
14 Sue Bird's WNBA record 3,234
21 Home of New York's Museum Mile
23 Northern __ apples
24 Like the Chukchi people of Russia
26 Fool
28 Fix
32 Yona of "My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic," for one
33 Media personality JoJo
34 Bring on
35 Let out
36 Instrument played with a bachi
37 Region of Chile used by NASA to test equipment for Mars missions
38 Fooled
40 Expand, in a way
41 Upturned feature of some snakes
42 Pen
45 Shard
47 Pirouette, essentially
48 Unworthy of consideration
49 Tool box item
55 Text to someone who's late
57 Velvet rope crosser
58 "O Deus ego __ te": Catholic hymn
59 Scrip spec



By Stella Zawistowski ©2024 *Tribune Content Agency* 3/2/24

SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

				6			8	
6			5		8			
3	2			1	7		6	
8		3			9			6
				5	1	4		
	1				4		2	
		1	3			7		8
					6		3	
	3						9	1

Difficulty: ★★★★ 3/2

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CRYPTOQUIP

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

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MLXWGHIJYIAE RXDIAE DKXZMW CWXVBRI BDMV GE RWXZY CWHYRMD JYV CWHYRMDDMD: KMHW RXYVHIHXYMW.

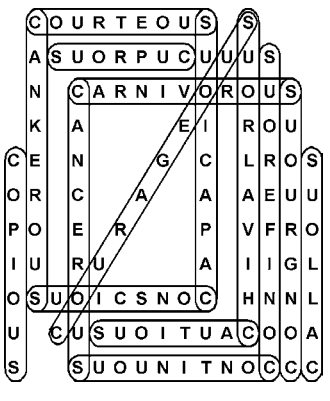
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: D equals S

ANSWER: Exorbitantly costly shower product used by crown princes and princesses: heir conditioner.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

1	7	2	5	8	4	3	9	6
6	9	8	3	1	2	7	4	5
5	4	3	9	6	7	1	2	8
3	8	5	2	7	1	9	6	4
7	2	1	6	4	9	5	8	3
4	6	9	8	3	5	2	1	7
9	5	7	4	2	6	8	3	1
2	3	6	1	5	8	4	7	9
8	1	4	7	9	3	6	5	2

C....OUS



S	H	E	M	P	■	E	A	R	■	R	A	S	P	S
T	O	R	A	H	■	S	U	E	■	E	X	P	A	T
I	D	A	H	O	■	A	D	A	■	R	E	E	S	E
R	A	T	A	T	O	U	I	L	L	E	■	E	S	E
■	■	■	L	O	N	■	M	E	A	N	D	E	R	■
D	B	C	O	O	P	E	R	■	O	D	O	R	■	■
O	O	H	■	P	A	R	I	S	■	S	L	A	T	E
S	W	I	M	■	R	O	C	K	Y	■	A	C	A	I
A	L	L	O	T	■	S	K	I	E	S	■	E	R	R
■	■	D	O	H	A	■	S	M	E	L	T	R	O	E
P	A	S	T	E	L	S	■	■	S	E	B	■	■	■
I	M	P	■	O	P	P	E	N	H	E	I	M	E	R
P	A	L	E	R	■	R	U	E	■	P	R	O	V	O
P	H	A	S	E	■	I	R	E	■	I	D	B	E	T
I	L	Y	S	M	■	G	O	D	■	N	S	Y	N	C

What to watch

SATURDAY

March 2, 2024

All times Central. Start times can vary based on cable/satellite provider. Confirm times on your on-screen guide.

Formula 1 Racing: Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix

ESPN, 8:55 a.m. Live

Formula 1 ignites its 2024 campaign in the Middle East with the Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix at Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir. This is the first time the F1 season begins on a Saturday (to accommodate the Muslim holy time of Ramadan).

NBA Basketball

NBA TV & ABC, beginning at 4 p.m. Live

The Utah Jazz are at the Miami Heat for a Saturday matinee on NBA TV. In primetime on ABC, Nikola Jokia and the Denver Nuggets take on LeBron James and the Lakers in Los Angeles.



LIFETIME

Single Black Female 2: Simone's Revenge

Lifetime, 7 p.m. ■ Original Film

Three years after narrowly escaping the murderous clutches of her half sister Simone (Amber Riley), Monica (Raven Goodwin) is ready for a fresh start in Seattle as the host of the city's top primetime investigative television program. With her best friend Bebe (K. Michelle) by her side and a new love interest, things are looking up for Monica. Secretly nursed back to health and suffering from amnesia, Simone is building a new life when she comes across Monica on TV and her memories come rushing back, leading to a fateful reunion between the sisters.

Svengoolie Classic Horror & Sci-Fi Movie

MeTV, 7 p.m.

Sven introduces the 1944 Universal monster movie *The Invisible Man's Revenge*, starring John Carradine as a scientist who tests his invisibility serum on an escapee from a psychiatric hospital (Jon Hall), who then goes on a crime spree.

The 51st Annual Saturn Awards

Comet, 9 p.m.

Comet is the television home for this year's Saturn Awards ceremony. The latest installment of this long-running event was held (and livestreamed) Feb. 4 and honored the best in science fiction, fantasy and horror from July 2022 through September 2023. Among the film nominees this year were *Avatar: The Way of Water*, *Barbie*, *Scream VI* and *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3*. Special awards that were presented included the Visionary Award, given to Christopher Nolan (*Oppenheimer*), and the inaugural Lance Reddick Legacy Award, presented to Keanu Reeves.

CATCH A CLASSIC

31 Days of Oscar 2024: Best Actor

TCM, beginning at 3 a.m.

Turner Classic Movies' 31 Days of Oscar event continues this morning and into the early evening with a lineup featuring films led by men who won or were nominated for Best Actor: **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde** (1931, win for Fredric March, who tied with Wallace Beery for The Champ); **The Great Dictator** (1940, nomination for Charles Chaplin); **The Thin Man** (1934, nomination for William Powell); **Goodbye, Mr. Chips** (pictured) (1939, win for Robert Donat); **Anatomy of a Murder** (1959, nomination for James Stewart); **Elmer Gantry** (1960, win for Burt Lancaster); and **East of Eden**



TURNER ENTERTAINMENT CO.

(1955, the first of James Dean's two consecutive posthumous nominations; he also received one the following year for Giant). Starting in primetime and going into Sunday morning are films starring Best Actor winners: **Lincoln** (2012, Daniel Day-Lewis), making its TCM premiere; **A Man for All Seasons** (1966, Paul Scofield); **Sergeant York** (1941, Gary Cooper); and **Yankee Doodle Dandy** (1942, James Cagney).

ACES ON BRIDGE

By Bobby Wolff

As South, your frisky three-diamond preempt fetches a wildly optimistic raise from North. However, West's lead of the club ace establishes dummy's king; can you exploit his generosity?

If either major-suit finesse is working, you will be fine. You can also succeed on normal play if hearts split 3-3, providing a second spade discard from hand. However, if you draw trumps and lead a heart to the queen and king, then a spade might come back, and force you to a premature guess.

It is better to play the first heart through East, taking an indirect finesse. East cannot afford to rise with the heart king, and at least if the jack loses, West will not be able to restrict your options with a spade shift. You will thus have time to test hearts and play them off before deciding whether you need the spade finesse. You can improve this line even further by cashing the heart ace first. This will endplay West if he was dealt king-doubleton in hearts, the club queen and the spade king.

So, you ruff the club lead, draw trumps, play the heart ace and lead another heart. Today, East cannot afford to rise with the heart king without setting up the suit, but ducking allows you to score the heart jack, cross back to a trump and throw your last heart on the club king. East falls victim to a Morton's Fork coup.

Note that if you had taken a simple heart finesse, East would have had to shift to a spade to break up the entries for a black-suit squeeze against West.

NORTH 03-2-A
♠ 8 6
♥ A Q 5 4
♦ A K Q 7
♣ K J 2

WEST
♠ K 9 4 2
♥ 10 7
♦ J
♣ A Q 7 5 4 3

EAST
♠ J 10 7 3
♥ K 9 8 6
♦ 9
♣ 10 9 8 6

SOUTH
♠ A Q 5
♥ J 3 2
♦ 10 8 6 5 4 3 2
♣ ---

Vulnerable: East-West
Dealer: South

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
3 ♦	Pass	6 ♦	All pass

Opening Lead: Club ace

LEAD WITH THE ACES

South holds:
♠ A Q 5
♥ J 3 2
♦ 10 8 6 5 4 3 2
♣ ---

South	West	North	East
		1 NT	Pass
?			

ANSWER: This hand has too much potential to sign off in three diamonds. What you would like to do is invite game or show a game-force with diamonds and short clubs below three no-trump. Unfortunately, most systems cannot achieve this. Three no-trump would be a shot in the dark, and five diamonds is a fair way off, so I suppose that leaves the underbid of signing off in three diamonds (with whatever method you use).

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LOOKING BACK

1962: Wilt Chamberlain scored 100 points for the Philadelphia Warriors in a game against the New York Knicks, an NBA record that still stands. Philadelphia won the game, 169-147.

1995: the Internet search engine website Yahoo! was incorporated by founders Jerry Yang and David Filo.

2021: Bunny Wailer, the last surviving founding member of the legendary reggae group The Wailers, died in his native Jamaica at age 73.

BIRTHDAYS

Actor **Barbara Luna** is 85. Author **John Irving** is 82. Singer **Jay Osmond** is 69. Former tennis player **Kevin Curren** is 66. Rock singer **Jon Bon Jovi** is 62. Blues singer-musician **Alvin Youngblood Hart** is 61. Actor **Daniel Craig** is 56. Rock singer **Chris Martin** (Coldplay) is 47. Actor **Heather McComb** is 47. Actor **Rebel Wilson** is 44. Actor **Nathalie Emmanuel** is 35. Country singer **Luke Combs** is 34. Singer-rapper-actor **Becky G** is 27.

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Robin Jerstad/Contributor

The interior of the Turners' Hill Country home reflects their backgrounds, meshing Vina's upbringing in New Mexico with John's Texas roots.

Southwest vibes

New Mexico meets Texas in home perfect for parties

By Richard A. Marini
STAFF WRITER

SAN MARCOS — There was plenty that Vina and John Turner loved about the contemporary Hill Country house they bought here in early 2017: the layout, the kitchen, the wood-trimmed doors and the windows throughout.

But they also knew they needed to make several changes before it truly felt like their home, including expanding the owner's suite and building an outdoor kitchen where they could effortlessly entertain friends and family.

They also wanted the interior to better reflect their backgrounds, meshing Vina's upbringing in Las Cruces, N.M., with Dallas native John's Texas roots. So they added Southwest-inspired furnishings, art and lighting fixtures, and repainted the blah, yellow-cream walls with a rich glaze in shades of beige.

The result is a handsome, rustic home with real New Mexico pueblo style.

"I've always loved the rustic Southwestern look," said Vina Turner who co-owns an urgent care and free-standing emergency room company with her husband. "But I also wanted it a little bit contemporary, too."

To achieve this look, they called in Shane Harrell, owner of New Braunfels-based Craftmaster Homes, to oversee what became an eight-month, $180,000 project completed in August 2019.

The most complex part of the job, according to Harrell, was extending the owner's suite bedroom by 8 feet, adding about 170 square feet. This required demolishing the roof and replacing it with a 14-foot-high cathedral ceiling made of pine boards with cedar crossbeams. The result is an airy, high-ceiling room that feels larger than it is.

While planning the work, the Turners told Harrell they wanted the bedroom to have plenty of light and views of their thickly wooded lot, which falls away from the back of the house. So he installed sliding glass doors that lead out to a new

Southwest continues on A15



Richard A. Marini/Staff

The owner's suite bathroom has a large soaking tub and a glass-fronted sauna.

Identifying birds by their song is as easy as clicking on an app

By Gary Clark
CORRESPONDENT

Spring is the time to tune your ears to melodies and call notes of songbirds, as males sing their hearts out during spring breeding season.

It's also the best time to learn the names of each songbird just by hearing its song and calls. A song is harmonious, whereas a call usually consists of short, chip-sounding notes. If you need some help identifying those notes and birds, download a free cellphone app called Merlin at merlin.allaboutbirds.org/download. Merlin records the birds singing in your yard or a park, then highlights the names of the various songbirds on your cellphone. That makes it much easier to learn birdsongs than when old birders like me had to memorize prerecorded birdsongs on cassette tapes. Ultimately, we learned which birds were singing by going outside to listen and look until we could confidently match a song to a bird. Merlin cuts the time it takes to learn birdsongs by recording the songs of birds in real time as you stand outside. But it's not as perfect as the human ear and sometimes makes mistakes. So look at what Merlin shows as probable singing birds and double-check with your eyes and ears. Truth is your brain processes bird-

Nature continues on A15



Kathy Adams Clark/Contributor

Male eastern bluebirds perch in the yard softly singing "chuwee-chuwee" tunes. In March, full warbling song will begin.

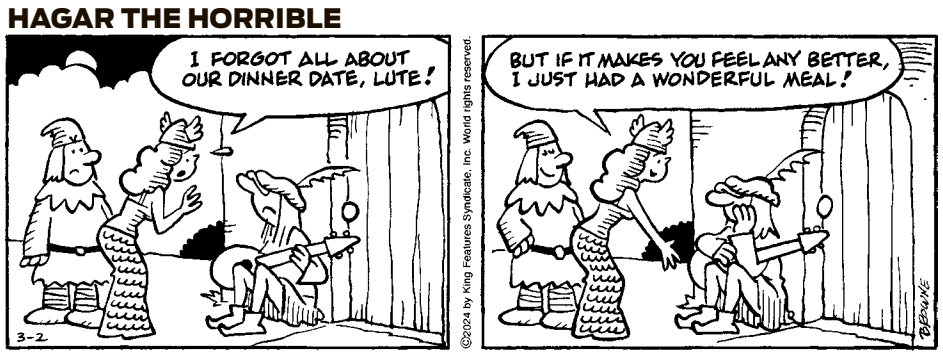
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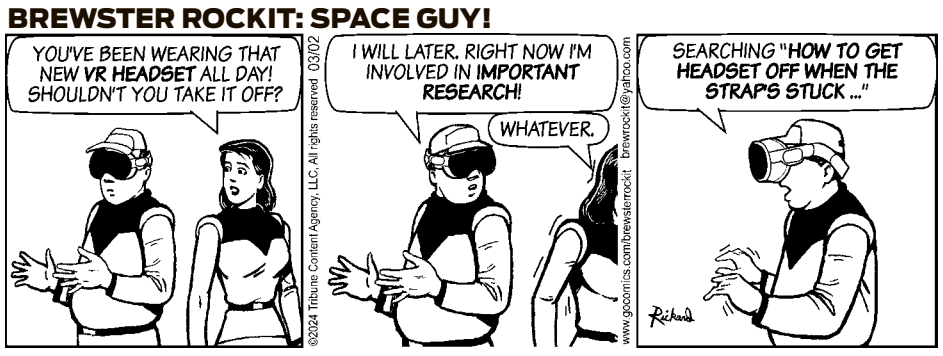
MOTHER GOOSE AND GRIMM



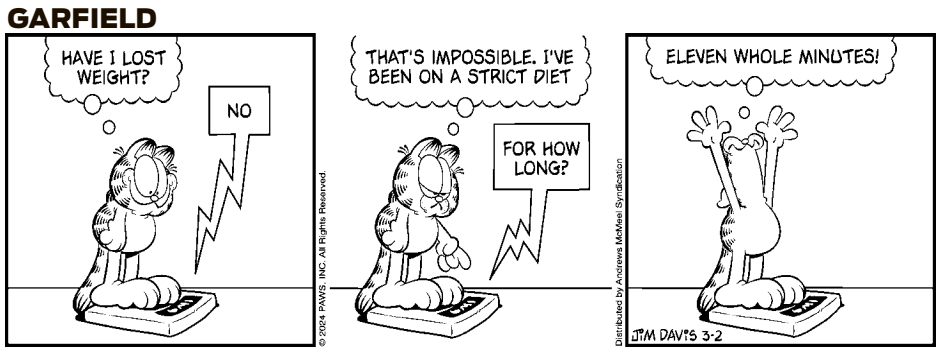
HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



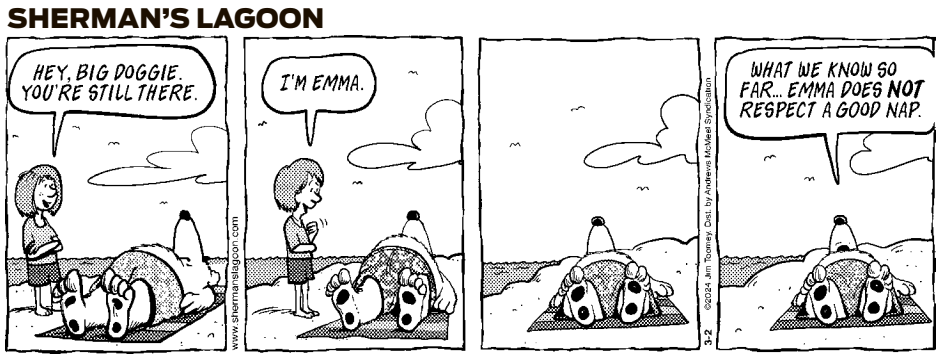
BREWSTER ROCKIT: SPACE GUY!



GARFIELD



SHERMAN'S LAGOON

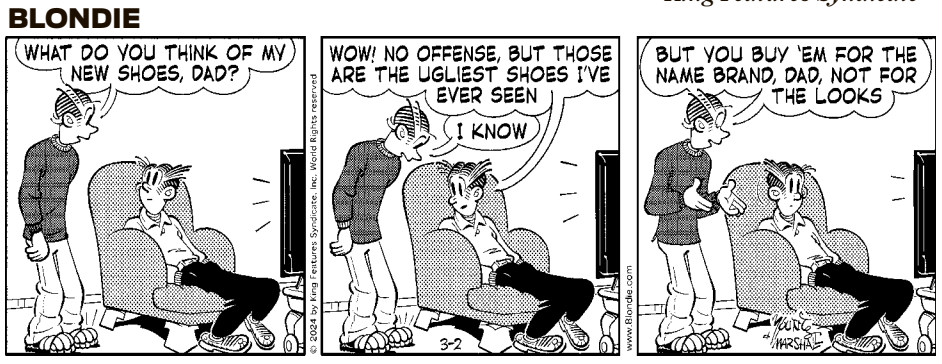


ROYAL STARS

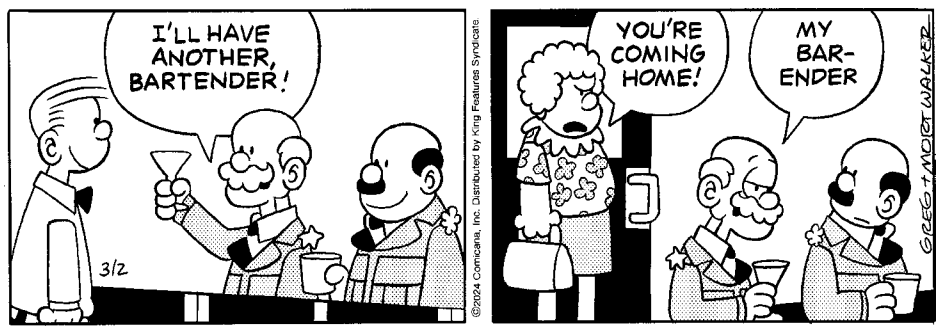
Today's Birthday (March 2). You are an independent thinker who is loyal to your loved ones. Once you know what you want to do, you go for it. It's time to create solid foundations in your life. Take charge of your health.
Moon Alert: After 9 a.m. EST today (6 a.m. PST) there are no restrictions to shopping or important decisions. After that, the Moon moves from Scorpio into Sagittarius.
Aries (March 21-April 19) ★★★★ You have a strong sense of adventure today. Travel would be ideal. If you can't travel, then be a tourist in your own town. Meet people from different backgrounds. Tonight: Privacy.
Taurus (April 20-May 20) ★★★ The Moon is in one of your Money Houses, which will focus your attention on taxes, debt, and shared property. You're in an excellent position to deal with these matters today. Tonight: Friendships.
Gemini (May 21-June 20) ★★★ You will have to go more than halfway when dealing with others. Nevertheless, you will enjoy the company of friends and partners. Tonight: You are admired.
Cancer (June 21-July 22) ★★★ It will please you to help someone today. The reverse might be true, and someone might help you today, especially a co-worker. You also might learn something that can benefit your own health. Tonight: Explore!
Leo (July 23-Aug. 22) ★★★★ This is a lovely day to socialize with others. Explore the arts if possible, because you will appreciate escaping into something different and stimulating. Tonight: Check your finances.
Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) ★★★ Cocoon at home today and relax among familiar surroundings. Memories of your childhood will bubble to the surface of your mind. onight: Partnerships.
Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) ★★★★ Study something new today. You also might enjoy a warm connection with relatives or neighbors. A short trip will please you, especially if you can see new places and meet new faces. Tonight: Work.
Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) ★★★ Today you're focused on financial matters. Or perhaps you're focused on shopping or making a big purchase, especially for something beautiful. Tonight: Play!
Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) ★★★★ Today the Moon is in your sign, which will make you more emotional than usual. However, it will also make you friendly and pave the way for dealing with others. Tonight: Cocoon.
Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) ★★★ You'll enjoy a chance for some privacy. You need to take a breather from the busyness of everything around you. Use this private time to explore romance. Tonight: Discussions!
Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) ★★★★ You feel sociable and friendly. In fact, a friendship might turn into a romantic connection. Interaction with artistic people will also benefit you. Tonight: Maintain your belongings.
Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20) ★★★ People notice you more than usual because something about your private life seems to be more public for some reason. This is a good day to ask for a raise. Tonight: You're strong.

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BLONDIE



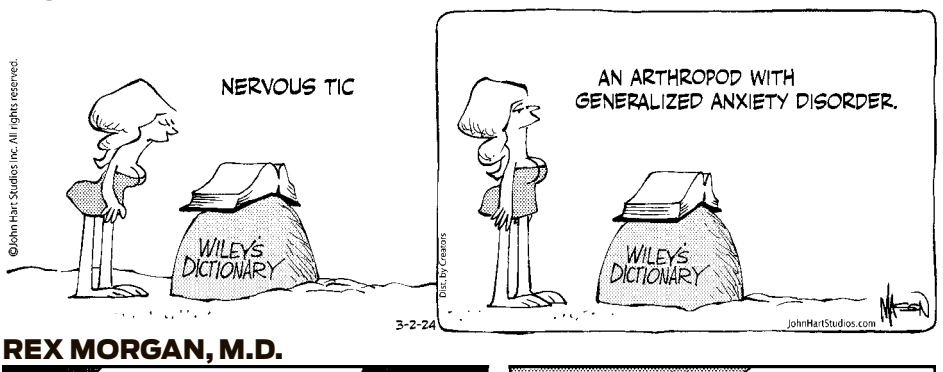
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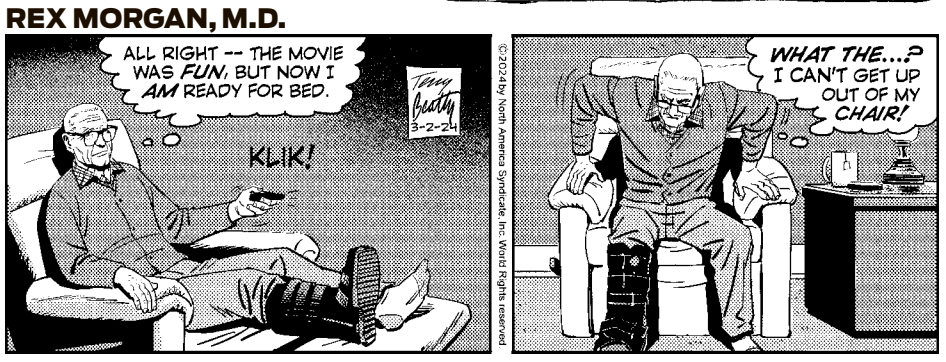
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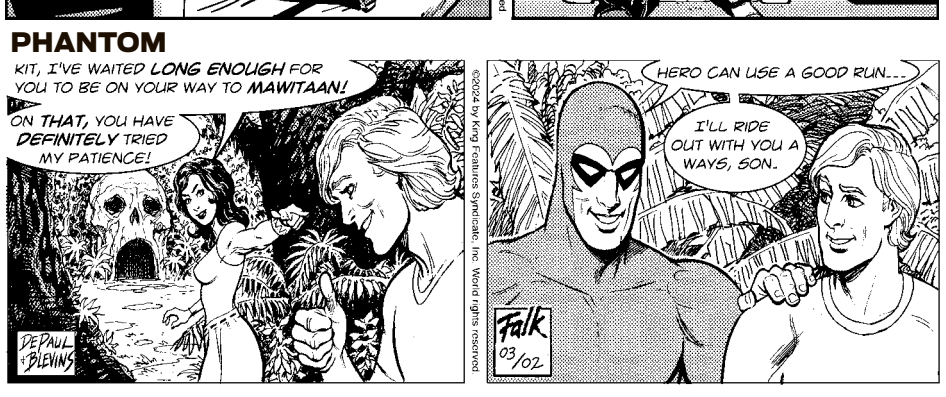
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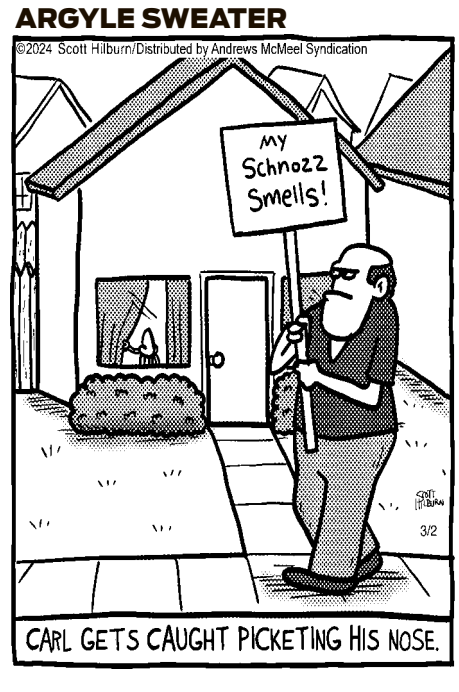
REX MORGAN, M.D.



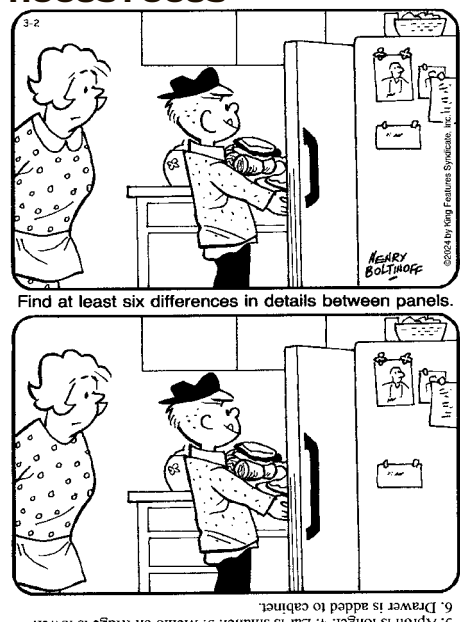
PHANTOM



ARGYLE SWEATER

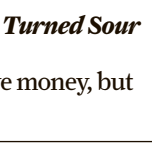


HOCUS FOCUS



Find at least six differences in details between panels.

Differences: 1. Handle is longer. 2. Woman's collar is missing. 3. Apron is longer. 4. Ear is smaller. 5. Memo on fridge is lower. 6. Drawer is added to cabinet.



Dear Abby

Dear Abby: My friend of eight years, "Lorna," had a family get-together for her daughter, who was graduating from college. I was not invited, which surprised me, since our families were always close. Both of our sons were best friends. After telling me about their party plans, Lorna asked if I could make my special cake. I felt obliged, so I made it and dropped it off the morning of their party.

Because it was a special gathering, I didn't want to put it in a cheap-looking plastic cake carrier. So I put it on the only other option I had — an ornate cut glass cake stand I had received as a gift years before. A few days after the party, Lorna and I met for breakfast and she told me she was sorry, but when her mother was washing the stand, it slipped out of her hands and she broke it. I was crushed because it had been given to me by a special friend.

I know accidents happen, but shouldn't they have offered to replace it? Lorna has mentioned that her parents were struggling financially, but she and her husband seem well-off. If Lorna had offered, I probably wouldn't have taken her up on it, but offering no compensation seemed odd to me. I no longer feel as close to her as before. Am I right to feel this way, or should I just let it go?

Sweet Turned Sour

Dear Sweet: Lorna may have money, but she apparently lacks class. She should have offered to replace the cake stand her mother broke. Of course, you could ask her to replace it, but even if she did, it wouldn't have the sentimental value of the one that was lost. In light of your long friendship, and now realizing Lorna has feet of clay, I suggest you let this go if you can. But in the future, if she asks again, think twice before putting on your apron.

Dear Abby: My husband and I have been married 46 years. During the last five, he has procrastinated about doing our income taxes to the point that we have been charged penalties. He keeps saying he'll work on it, but everything else is a bigger priority.

I gathered all the necessary documents and printed out a tax worksheet. My husband has his own small business, which complicates things. I hate this hanging over my head. I told him I won't go on our planned camping trip if this isn't done beforehand, and I intend to follow through. I can't get him to give me a straight answer for why he keeps doing this. It's ruining our otherwise great marriage.

Money Woes In Florida

Dear Money Woes: Locate a certified public accountant who can take over this task. Then give your husband a deadline to file the taxes, and if he doesn't meet it, turn the necessary information over to the CPA, who may be able to discover something advantageous.

www.DearAbby.com
Andrews McMeel Syndication



Heloise

HINTS FROM HELOISE

Dear Readers: Ladders are so useful in our home, but you must be careful when using them. Read the warning label attached to your ladder for weight and height limits.

Always check the ladder rungs before climbing to be sure that they are study and dry. Keep the ladder on a solid level surface, not on wet dirt or gravel. And do not overextend your reach. Use both hands to climb.

For extra safety, paint every other rung with bright paint for a visual clue.

Heloise

Dear Heloise: I recently saw a product on TV that solidifies cooking grease so it can be put into the regular trash. I've saved vegetable cans, poured grease into them and stored it in the fridge until I tossed the whole can in the trash. But this product made me rethink that process.

Now when the can is full, I put it in a sink of warm water long enough to loosen the grease. (You may have to run a knife around the edge.) I then dump it from the can directly into the trash. Now I can just reuse the same grease can over and over and recycle the rest.

J., in Arkansas

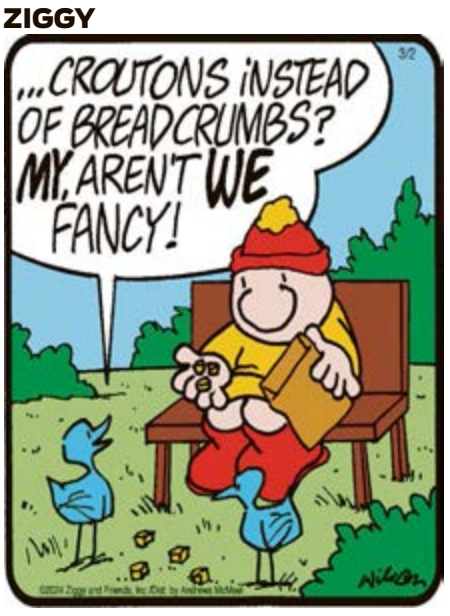
Heloise@heloise.com
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FAMILY CIRCUS



"Today we learned about the Top Ten Commandments."

ZIGGY



ZITS



MUTTS



WALLACE THE BRAVE



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



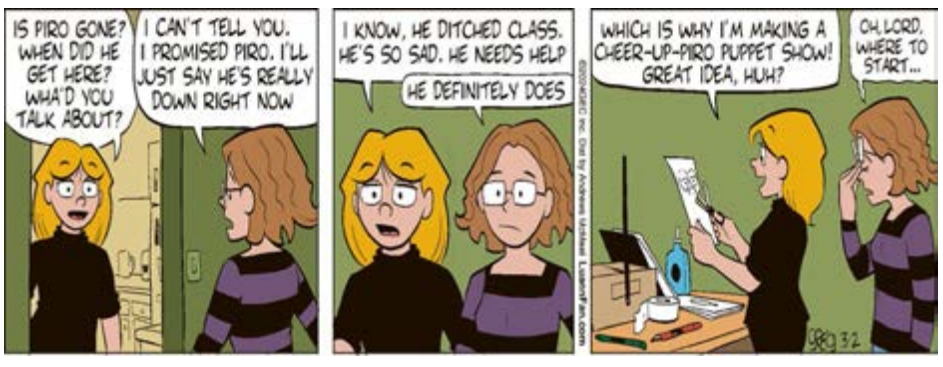
BABY BLUES



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HEART OF THE CITY



RHYMES WITH ORANGE



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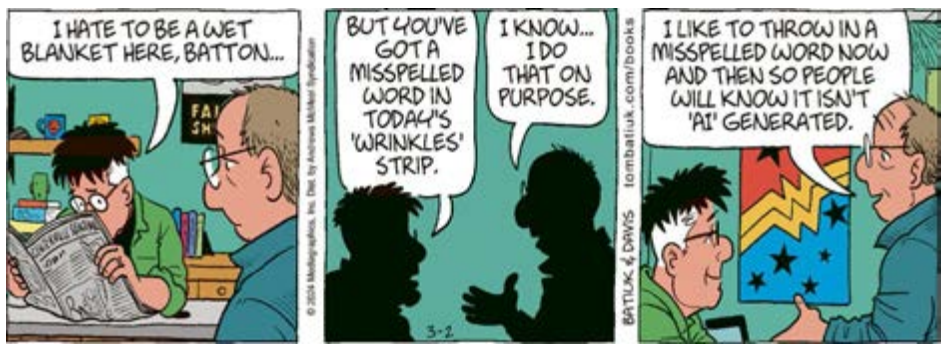
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SALLY FORTH



F MINUS



Features Editor Melissa Aguilar: features@chron.com

Velvet Taco opens location at Hobby Airport

By Bao Ong
STAFF WRITER



Velvet Taco

Velvet Taco is a Dallas-based fast-casual chain that offers diners a variety of taco combinations.

Velvet Taco has opened its first airport location at Hobby, nearly a year after the Houston City Council took steps to boot Pappas Restaurants as the airport's anchor dining vendor.

The Dallas-based fast-casual chain, which bills itself as a "funky taco spot creating international flavors," joins a slew of local and national chains that have taken over the food-and-beverage offerings at the airport. Velvet Taco, which has more than 40 U.S locations, is working with LaTrelle's Management Corporation to operate at Hobby.

"We're eager to serve a new guest base and present Velvet Taco to travelers from all over the world while also welcoming visitors from our home state at Houston's Hobby Airport," Clay Dover, Velvet Tacos' CEO, said in a prepared statement. "This opening is just the beginning of our plans to bring innovative tacos and global flavors to more airports and non-traditional locations in the near future."

Velvet Taco is the latest opening since the Pappas Restaurants' foothold on Houston's secondary airport ended after a two-decade run. City Council had awarded a 10-year, $470 million contract to Areas USA, which is part of a Spanish concessions conglomerate.

Since launching in 2011, Velvet Taco has been known for its fusion menu offering tacos with an array of fillings, from crispy chicken tenders doused in spicy tikka to Korean fried rice with slow-roasted pulled pork with red chile aioli. The chain's red velvet cake, with layers of cream cheese frosting covered in a cajeta drizzle, will also be on the menu.

New to the Hobby outlet, which is located by gates 46 and 47, is the Electric Lemonade cocktail. Travelers can order the drink made with Tito's vodka, dragon fruit and lemonade or one of the chain's popular Sangrita Swirls.

A bevy of national chains are more prominent at Hobby since Pappas Restaurants left, including Buffalo Wild Wings, Chik-fil-A, Dunkin, Starbucks and Wendy's.

Local businesses such as Fat Cat Creamery and Hubcap Grill & Beer Yard are already open, but a possible vendor with a large following includes Killen's BBQ, one of the top barbecue joints in Houston.

While Pappas no longer operates Pappas Bar-B-Q, Pappadeaux Seafood Kitchen, Pappas Burger and Pappasito's Cantina out of Hobby, the restaurant group remains popular in Houston and is known for its customer service. Pappas also owns Little's Oyster Bar, which topped the Houston Chronicle's list of best restaurants in 2023.

SOUTHWEST

From page A12

balcony, as well as a pair of large windows above them.

"It's beautiful at night, looking out at the stars," Turner said. "John loves to sit on the balcony smoking a cigar and making business calls."

In keeping with the home's New Mexico vibe, they installed a tall kiva fireplace in the bedroom, elevating the firebox so it's visible from the bed. The bed is centered against a pony wall topped with several decorative crossbeams.

Behind the wall is the bathroom, where they added a large soaking tub and a glass-fronted sauna. "I love baths ... and the sauna was my husband's idea," Turner said. "We both enjoy taking a sauna after working out."

The bathroom suite's tall, arched ceilings and glazed walls have a soothing, spalike effect. "It's really a comfortable space and we spend a lot of time here," Turner said. "Everybody who sees it says, 'Wow, you really changed the qi in here,' " she added, using the traditional Chinese term for "energy."

The pool and hot tub were already in the backyard when the couple moved in. But right outside the back doors there wasn't much more than a covered, stamped-concrete patio and fireplace.

To make the space more conducive to entertaining, Harrell added a large, rustic kitchen outfitted with a gas grill, farmhouse sink, refrigerator and stone pizza oven. Everything's faced with tumbled Hill Country-style limestone, and the island is topped with black, leathered granite finished with a live edge. It's the perfect spot to entertain while the Turners' two young kids play outdoors.

The four bar stools that belly up to the island provide a whimsical touch: Two are western-style saddles, and two have steel tractor seats.



Photos by Robin Jerstad/Contributor

Much of the outdoor kitchen and dining area is faced with tumbled Hill Country-style limestone.

"I've always loved the rustic Southwestern look. But I also wanted it a little bit contemporary, too."

Vina Turner, homeowner

"We had a crawfish boil the other weekend," Turner said. "Probably had about 20 people. It wasn't planned, but I'm telling you, it happens every weekend that somebody decides they want to come over and have a party."



A pony wall extending partway to the ceiling hides the entry to the owner's bath.

NATURE

From page A12

songs far better than Merlin.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology released the Merlin app in 2014. But it was woefully unreliable. For example, I held my cellphone close to a singing Carolina wren. Merlin misidentified it as a brown thrasher.

That's because the wren sings more than 50 different songs, and the thrasher sings more than 1,000 different songs. And the mockingbird sings more than 200 different songs.

After years of continued development — call it training — Merlin is reasonably good at detecting differences among similar-sounding birds. You can now head outside to let Merlin help you learn which songbirds sing which songs.



Kathy Adams Clark/Contributor

American robins nest in the area and sing their jolting song at dawn.

But verify the songbirds with your own ears, because human hearing outmatches Merlin.

Merlin also enables you to take a cellphone photograph of a bird and match the photo with its immense library of bird photos to give you the most probable name of the bird.

How long before a pair of binoculars with a built-in type of Merlin can name a songbird you're viewing by its looks and vocalizations?

IDENTIFYING SONGBIRDS

- Male songbirds are the typical songsters, but many females, like northern cardinals, also sing.
- Males sing to announce and defend breeding territories, demonstrate vigor, warn off intruding males and communicate with their mates and offspring.
- A songbird's voice box consists of a bony vocal chassis called a syrinx, which rests in the chest at the base of the windpipe.
- Twin bronchial tubes branch from the windpipe into the lungs.
- Muscular action in the syrinx stretches and relaxes thin syringeal membranes.
- A bird's song occurs as air from the bronchi vibrates the syringeal membranes and as muscles adjust membrane tension, much like a drummer adjusts the skin on a drum.
- The more complex the syringeal muscles, the more complex the song.
- Birdsong resonates within the syrinx, not in the oral cavity as it does in humans.

Email Gary Clark at texasbirder@comcast.net. He is the author of "Book of Texas Birds," with photography by Kathy Adams Clark (Texas A&M University Press).

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SPORTS

HOUSTONCHRONICLE.COM • SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 2024 • SECTION B



Karen Warren/Staff photographer

Astros outfielder Kyle Tucker came one home run shy of a 30 homer-30 steal season in 2023.

Tucker's savvy sets up steals

Despite lack of speed, outfielder ranks among league's elite on basepaths

By Matt Kawahara
STAFF WRITER

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — Kyle Tucker's final stolen base of last season told a story. In the fourth inning of a scoreless game at Arizona, the Astros' right fielder drew a one-out walk. He ambled to first base as José Abreu arrived to face pitcher Merrill Kelly.

Behind Abreu crouched Gabriel Moreno. Arizona's catcher was one of baseball's best at combating the running game last season. His 39% caught-stealing rate led the majors. Only five catchers averaged a faster pop time on throws to second base. He snuck a glance at Tucker as Kelly set with his first pitch.

Kelly was susceptible to the running game last year. The Arizona righty prevented fewer base advances on average than only 12 qualified pitchers, per Baseball Savant. He came set briefly and threw Abreu a first-pitch cutter away. Abreu did not swing. Moreno sprang up with a clean throwing lane to second.

His throw arrived late. Tucker had stood just 9.9 feet from first base when Kelly made his first movement from the stretch, per Baseball Savant. But when Kelly released his pitch, Tucker had already covered 15.6 more feet toward second, the result of a jump that appeared almost anticipatory.

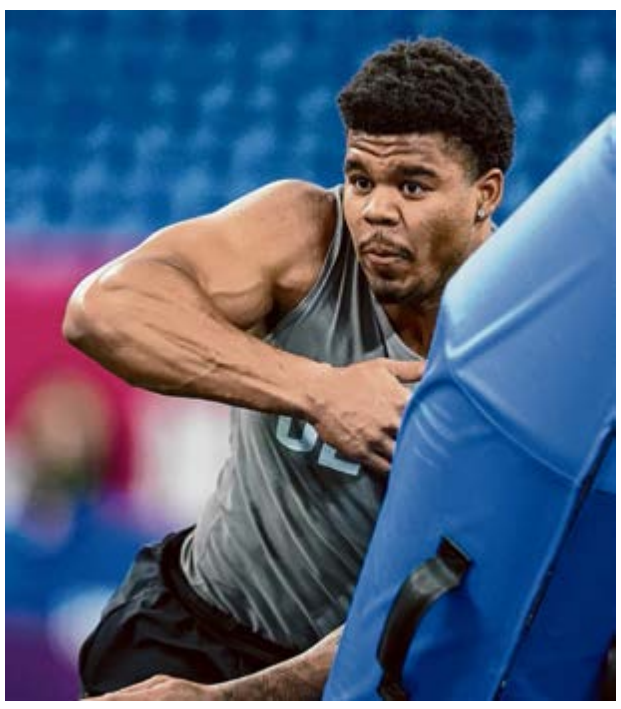
Tucker slid headfirst into second, his outstretched left hand hitting the bag a split-second before the tag. It marked his 30th stolen base of the season, a noted benchmark and new career high. Two pitches later, Abreu doubled to drive in Tucker for the lone run of a Houston win.

The sequence distilled what some Astros say

Astros continues on B2

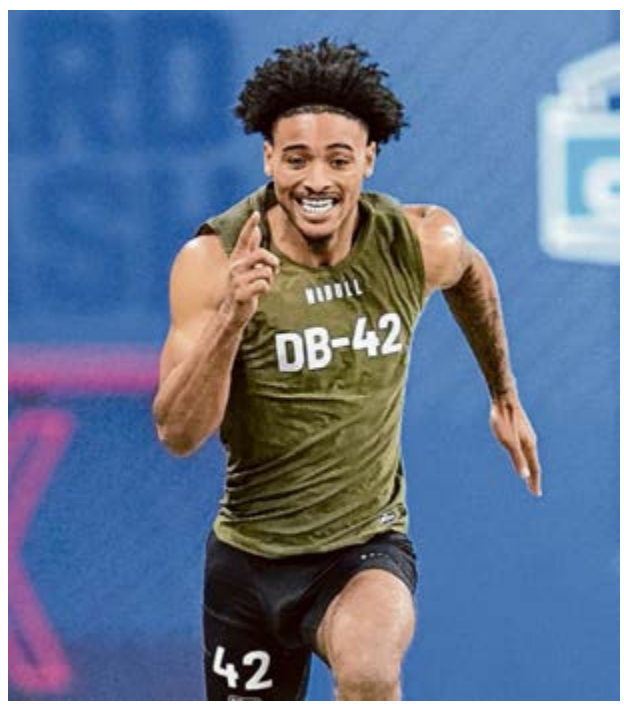
INSIDE

Valdez tries his hand at calling his own pitches. **B2**



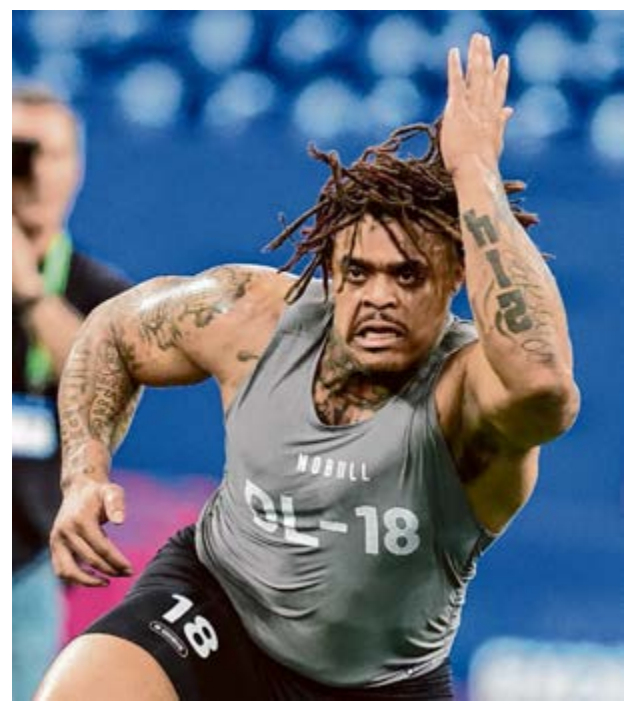
Michael Conroy/Associated Press

Penn State defensive lineman Chop Robinson.



Michael Conroy/Associated Press

Clemson defensive back Nate Wiggins.



Michael Conroy/Associated Press

Texas defensive lineman Byron Murphy.



Darron Cummings/Associated Press

Alabama defensive back Kool-Aid McKinstry.

TEXANS

Plenty of options at No. 23

Free agency expected to fill team's needs, letting Ryans pick best available player

By Jonathan M. Alexander
STAFF WRITER

The NFL draft isn't as clear-cut for the Texans in 2024 as it was in 2023.

Last season, with the No. 2 and No. 12 picks at their disposal, it was clear early on the Texans were going to target a quarterback and/or a defensive end.

And only one team — the Carolina Panthers, who picked No. 1 — could have changed the course of their first pick.

But the Texans are selecting at No. 23 this season, a pick they got from trading Deshaun Watson to the Cleveland Browns in 2022. And whom the Texans pick there is almost anyone's guess with 22 teams drafting before them.

What's clear, though, are the Texans' current needs and wants. Coach DeMeco Ryans has said they want to build their defensive line. They have two starters there — end Jonathan Greenard and tackle Sheldon Rankins — who are pending free agents, as are two backups.

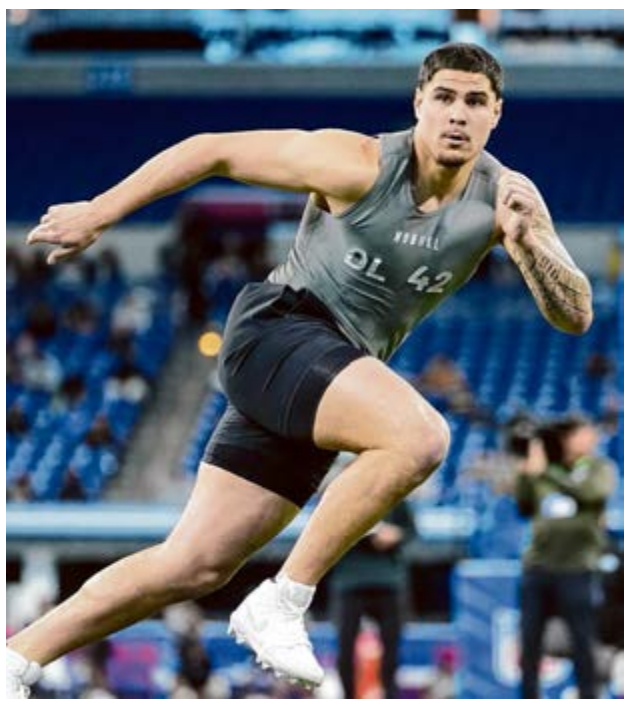
Then there's cornerback, with Steven Nelson's impending free agency, as well as wide receiver, where Ryans said he was looking for a separator

Texans continues on B4



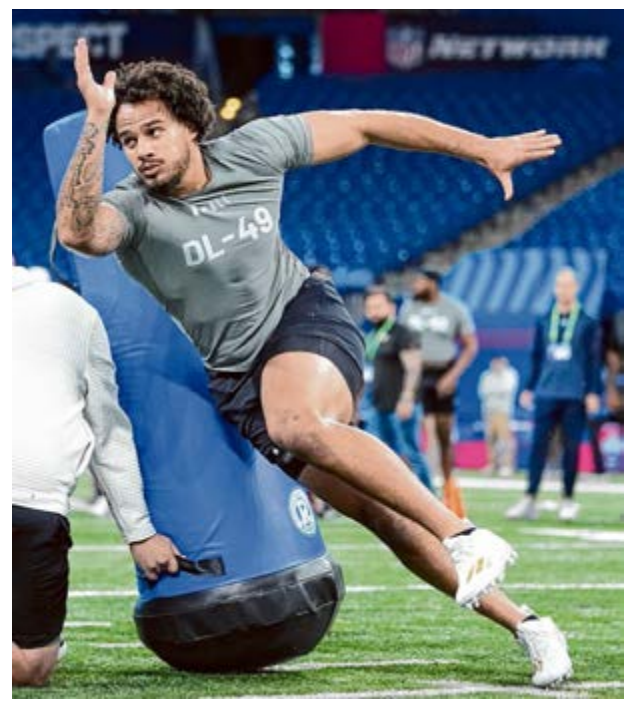
Michael Hickey/Getty Images

Illinois defensive lineman Johnny Newton.



Michael Conroy/Associated Press

UCLA defensive lineman Laiatu Latu.



Michael Conroy/Associated Press

Washington defensive lineman Bralen Trice.

Green a bright spot in road loss to Suns

Guard shows signs of heating up after recent struggles



Christian Petersen/Getty Images

Despite fidgeting with a taped-up injury on his hand, Jalen Green scored 34 points in a loss to the Suns.



Jonathan Feigen
ON THE ROCKETS

PHOENIX — Rockets guard Jalen Green kept grabbing at his left hand, adjusting the tape that held two fingers together, never seeming comfortable with the nagging ache in the one finger he said he "ripped open last game" or the tape.

He might need to wear that tape through the rest of the season, maybe through his career.

As the Rockets clanged their way through their worst shooting game of the season Thursday night, Green had one of his best scoring games. He brought not just a bright spot to a 110-105 loss to the Phoenix Suns, the Rockets' ninth consecutive road defeat, but a reason to hope he can turn around his own shooting woes.

Green scored 34 points, matching his second-highest total this season. Though he joined the misfire brigade in the fourth quarter, rushing up shots when the Rockets were trying to com-

Rockets continues on B3

UP NEXT

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MLB

ASTROS NOTEBOOK

Valdez tries calling his own pitches

By Matt Kawahara
STAFF WRITER



Karen Warren/Staff photographer

Framber Valdez said he alternated calling pitches with catcher Yanier Diaz in his outing Friday against the Nationals, using a PitchCom transmitter on his glove.

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — **Framber Valdez** initiated an experiment Friday. The Astros starter emerged for his Grapefruit League debut with a new accessory, a PitchCom transmitter, attached to his glove.

Valdez intends to try calling some of his own pitches in his outings this spring. He and catcher **Yainer Diaz** alternated calling pitches Friday for his 1⅓ innings against the Nationals.

"Felt pretty good, the same if Yainer was calling the pitches," Valdez said through an interpreter. "I think when you have control of the game, it doesn't really matter who's calling, if he's calling or I am. The biggest thing is just try to make the right pitch and throw it to the right spot."

Last season, Valdez wore a PitchCom receiver in his hat to receive signals but did not call his own pitches. It was MLB's first year allowing pitchers to wear the transmitter, a device with buttons for specific pitches and locations, affording them a chance to call their own games.

Valdez said the pitch-calling Friday was "fluid" between him and Diaz, who did not catch Valdez last year, when the left-hander worked solely with **Martín Maldonado**. In the first inning, Valdez appeared to make calls for his first two hitters, then received calls facing his third with a runner on base.

"Framber just wants to go and give it a try," manager **Joe Espada** said. "That's what spring training is for. We'll talk to him about it and see how he felt about it."

Valdez faced 11 batters and retired four of them in a brief spring debut. He allowed five hits, walked one batter and hit another. Nationals shortstop **CJ Abrams** led off his first inning with an opposite-field home run on an elevated sinker. Valdez struck out two batters and surrendered three runs.

Valdez said his "intensity" level was "maybe like a 40, 50% out there." He said his sinker "felt good coming out of the hand" and induced some "so-so contact." Espada said Valdez's sinker registered in the mid-90s and was "up in the zone a bit," not where it's best suited for inducing ground balls.

Last year, Valdez might have thrown his sinker too hard at times, negating some of its natural downward movement. Valdez averaged 95.3 mph on his sinker, up from 93.9 mph in 2022, but averaged nearly four inches less vertical drop, per Statcast. Overall, his ground-ball rate fell to 55.2% from 67.4% in 2022.

"I think the quality of my pitches were good," Valdez said. "Obviously, first outing of spring, I can't go out there and just go 100%. So I think the more and more I go in spring, the more and more I'm going to raise the intensity."

Washington runners stole four bases during Valdez's outing. Holding runners was an issue for Valdez last season and is an area in which Espada wants the Astros to improve as a staff, but Valdez said his primary focus Friday was on pitch execution.

Odds & ends

Justin Verlander is scheduled to throw a bullpen session Sunday. The Astros will then determine if he is ready to face hitters in live batting practice, a decision that should clarify whether Verlander can still be ready for opening day. ... **Forrest Whitley** and **Shawn Dubin**, both candidates for Houston's bullpen, are not currently throwing. Whitley is dealing with right middle finger soreness. Dubin has inflammation in his right shoulder. ... A few of Houston's prospects contributed to a 10-8 win over Washington on Friday. Top prospect **Jacob Melton** hit an opposite-field two-run homer. **Shay Whitcomb** drove in three runs on two doubles. **Joey Loperfido** had an RBI double and is 4-for-9 in Grapefruit League play.

Astros 10, Nationals 8

Houston	ab	r	h	bi	Washington	ab	r	h	bi
McCormick lf	2	0	0	0	Abrams ss	2	1	2	2
Loperfido ph-lf	2	0	1	1	Vargas ss	3	1	1	0
Diaz c	4	0	0	0	Barley ss	1	0	0	0
Stubbs c	1	0	0	0	Thomas rf	1	0	1	1
Singleton 1b	3	0	2	0	Wood rf	1	0	1	0
Brewer pr-1b	2	1	0	0	Ruiz c	4	0	1	0
Meyers cf	1	0	0	0	Pineda c	1	0	0	0
Corona cf	2	1	1	0	Senzel 3b	3	0	1	0
Cabbage rf	3	0	0	0	House pr-3b	2	0	0	0
Stevens 3b	2	1	1	0	Winker lf	0	0	0	0
Hensley 3b	1	1	0	0	Hassell pr-lf	2	1	0	0
Dezenzo 3b	0	0	0	0	Yepez 1b	3	0	0	0
Melton ph-rf	3	2	1	2	Díaz 1b	2	1	1	0
Wagner dh	2	1	0	1	Lipscomb 2b	3	1	2	0
Berryhill ph-dh	1	0	0	0	Baker 2b	1	0	0	0
Kessinger ss	3	2	2	2	Travis B. dh	2	0	0	0
Matthews ss	1	1	0	0	Alu ph-dh	2	1	0	0
Whitcomb 2b	3	0	2	3	Robles cf	3	1	1	0
Hernandez 2b	1	0	0	0	Call cf	2	1	1	3
Totals	**37**	**10**	**10**	**9**	**Totals**	**38**	**8**	**12**	**6**

Houston	000	025	210	— 10
Washington	120	100	022	— 8

E—Whitcomb (1), Singleton (1), Hernandez 2 (2), Lipscomb (1), Díaz (1). DP—Houston 1, Washington 2. LOB—Houston 7, Washington 11. 2B—Whitcomb 2 (2), Loperfido (1). HR—Melton (1), Abrams (1), Call (1). SB—Thomas 2 (2), Winker (1), Abrams (1), Vargas 2 (2), House (1), Matthews (1), Corona (1). SF—Thomas (1).

Houston	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Valdez	1 1/3	5	3	3	1	2
Kuhnel	2/3	0	0	0	0	0
Pressly	1	1	0	0	0	0
Brown W,1-0	2	2	1	1	1	1
Kouba H,1	2	1	0	0	1	1
Blubaugh	1 1/3	3	4	2	2	1
Endersby S,1-1	2/3	0	0	0	0	1
Washington	**IP**	**H**	**R**	**ER**	**BB**	**SO**
Gore	3	1	0	0	1	3
Bleier H,1	1	1	0	0	0	1
Barnes	1	1	2	0	2	0
Irvin L,0-1 BS,0-1	1 2/3	5	7	6	2	2
Weems	1 1/3	1	1	1	1	1
Gsellman	1	1	0	0	1	1

HBP—Valdez (Thomas), Pressly (Winker). WP—Blubaugh.
Umpires—Home, Derek Thomas; First, Lance Barksdale; Second, Carlos Torres; Third, Edwin Moscoso.
T—2:57. A—2,514 (6,500).



Karen Warren/Staff photographer

Right fielder Kyle Tucker, left, succeeded in 30 of his 35 stolen base attempts last season and owns a career success rate of 86.5%.

ASTROS

From page B1

makes Tucker an effective base stealer, arguably one of the more unique in the majors. Tucker's build and slugging numbers do not suggest a stolen-base threat. Yet his totals have climbed each year, to where he finished one home run shy of a 30-30 campaign in 2023.

"I think he's smart," third baseman Alex Bregman said. "I think he gets good reads. I think he works on it ... jumps and picking good times to go, picking good counts to go, knowing the game. He's stealing bases, and he's doing it smart."

Pure foot speed is not Tucker's forte. Fourteen players stole more bases in the majors last season. All 14 averaged a sprint speed of 28 feet per second or better, per Baseball Savant. The major league average is 27 seconds. Tucker's sprint speed was 26.6 feet per second, in the bottom third of MLB players.

Tucker's sprint speed, per Baseball Savant, has ticked downward the last five seasons. But his stolen-base numbers have trended the opposite way. Tucker was 30-for-35 on attempts last season after notching 25 steals in 29 attempts in 2022.

"I just feel like I get good jumps and pick the right times to go," Tucker said. "There's plenty of guys who are probably faster than me in the league. But they might not feel as comfortable stealing bases or not get as good of jumps as they probably could. Which might be like choosing certain times to go that you feel the most comfortable and whatnot.

"It kind of just depends on the pitcher, really. If he's slow to the plate and I know I can get a good jump, then I can take off, and I feel comfortable doing that. But if he's quick to the plate or he's slide-stepping the whole time, (if) there's a combination of that and a good catcher with a good arm behind the plate, I might want to not take that chance in that certain scenario."

The new limit on pick-offs and pitch timer contributed to an MLB-wide spike in stolen base numbers and success rate last season. Four players notched 30 homer-30 steal seasons, the most in a year since 2011: Ronald Acuña Jr., Julio Rodríguez, Bobby Witt Jr. and Francisco Lindor. Tucker nearly joined them on the season's final day, but his attempt at an inside-the-park homer in Arizona was ruled a triple and fielder's choice.

Tucker saw a modest increase in stolen-base attempts while maintaining his above-average proficiency. Of the 10 major leaguers with more steals than Tucker over the last two seasons, just four have a higher success rate — Trea Turner, Corbin Carroll, Tommy Edman and Nico Hoerner. Tucker has been thrown out 13 times in 96 attempts in his career, an 86.5% success rate.

"He's a guy who has a feel for when he wants to go," Astros third-base coach Gary Pettis said. "As a base stealer, you have to have a feeling of when you can anticipate what you think the pitcher's going to do."

Tucker, at 6-foot-4, also has a long stride and typically an efficient first movement to start his direction toward second base, Pettis noted.

"With him, it's just a matter of wanting to do it," Pettis said. "He runs well enough; he gets good jumps. Sometimes we need him to do it, and he can. And then there's times when we don't need it. He still can, but he doesn't do it.

"He ended up with 30 stolen bases last year. For me, he's a guy that can steal 40 bases."

The Astros are not a team that relies on speed to create offense. Tucker accounted for a quarter of their stolen-base attempts last season, mostly doing so from the middle of their order. That he projects to hit cleanup this season, behind Yordan Alvarez and Alex Bregman, could lend itself to more such chances.

Tucker might be less apt to run if on base for those extra-base threats, though a hot streak by whoever is behind him this season could have a similar effect. Adapting to situations is one reason Tucker is reticent to predict another stolen-base increase. He said he still views 20 steals in a season as a "rough" target.

"But if there's an opportunity that I think I can make it, I try to take my chances," Tucker said. "Whether it's 10 times in a year or 40 times in a year."

NOTEBOOK

Braves scratch ailing Acuña

WIRE REPORTS

NORTH PORT, Fla. — After reporting right knee soreness, Braves superstar Ronald Acuña Jr. went to be evaluated by a doctor, manager Brian Snitker said after Friday's 3-1 loss to the Orioles at CoolToday Park.

Snitker said Acuña — who was scratched from Friday's lineup "as a precaution," the Braves said — might've started feeling the soreness after he got caught in a rundown between second base and third base in Thursday's contest.

"They're gonna check him out," Snitker said. I don't think it'll be anything. It's probably one of those things that if it was during the season, he'd play. But still, we wanted to get it looked at, if it was enough that he said something."

Fanatics irked over criticism

Fanatics founder Michael Rubin says his company is being unfairly blamed for new Major League Baseball uniforms that have see-through pants and other fit and design problems.

"This is a little bit of a difficult position," he said on Friday at the MIT Sloan Sports Analytics Conference. "We're purely doing exactly as we've been told, and we've been told we're doing everything exactly right. And we're getting the s—— kicked out of us. So that's not fun."

Since reporting to spring training this month, some players have complained about the fit of new uniforms. The white pants worn by some teams are also see-through enough to clearly show tucked-in jersey tops.

Rubin said uniforms were made to the specifications set by MLB and Nike and added that Nike made changes "for all the right reasons" after getting feedback from players who wanted material more breathable and stretchable.

Canó catches on in Mexican league

Former major league second baseman Robinson Canó has signed with the Diablos Rojos of the Mexican Baseball League, the Mexico City club announced Friday.

The 41-year-old Canó finished with 1,306 RBIs, fourth all-time among second baseman, in a 17-year career, most of which he spent with the New York Yankees and Seattle Mariners. The eight-time All-Star last played in the big leagues in 2022, with Atlanta.

Canó will have a chance to play against the Yankees, who are set to play two exhibition games against the Diablos Rojos in Mexico City on March 24-25.

Odds and ends

Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash told reporters that infielder Yu Chang's oblique injury will sideline him for six to eight weeks. ... The Mariners' Julio Rodríguez is scheduled to make his Cactus League debut on Saturday against Oakland.

NBA

LAKERS ANALYSIS

LeBron's 40K a moment to savor

By Tim Reynolds
ASSOCIATED PRESS



Mark J. Terrill/Associated Press

The Lakers' LeBron James has scored at least nine points in each of his last 762 games, making it a near certainty that he'll reach 40,000 career points Saturday.

Father Time is likely to take another loss Saturday.

LeBron James is nine points away from becoming the first NBA player to reach 40,000. It's obviously reasonable to think that he'll get it when the Los Angeles Lakers host the Denver Nuggets on Saturday. James has scored at least nine points in each of his last 762 games that count, including playoffs.

He's been held under nine points a total of nine times in 21 seasons. In other words, 40,000 is about to happen. And since 50,000 points probably won't happen — though one never knows with the 39-year-old James — this will be another moment that is certainly worth savoring.

"No one has done it," James said. "And for me to be in this position at this point and time in my career, I think it's pretty cool. But is it one of the top things I've done in my career? No. Does it mean something? Of course. Why wouldn't it?"

He never set out in pursuit of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's scoring record; it just happened. He never set out in pursuit of Vince Carter's record of playing 22 seasons either; he'll tie that mark next year, barring some sort of seismic change in his plans or thinking. It's still about one thing, and that's the ring.

The Lakers aren't the favorites to win the title this season. But given how the oldest player in the NBA right now has performed this week, Laker Nation still has plenty of reasons to think that one more run to a Larry O'Brien Trophy is possible.

What he did on Wednesday night against the Los Angeles Clippers was pure theater. He outscored the Clippers 19-16 by himself in the fourth quarter, making five 3-pointers and leading the Lakers to a wild 116-112 comeback win. And then on Thursday night — a back-to-back for a 39-year-old with a bad ankle — he played 39 minutes, scored 31 points and had a huge chase-down block that became a game-saving play to help the Lakers get an overtime win against Washington.

"That's why he takes good care of himself," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "The fruits of his labor are on full display with plays like that."

The Wizards are bad, sure. But a win is a win, and the Lakers keep stacking them. They're 9-3 in their last 12 games, are five games over .500 and now get a shot at Denver in a rematch of last season's Western Conference finals mismatch.

That's James' focus entering Saturday. Not getting 40,000 points.

"We just want to get better," James said.

It's cliché, but true. That said, he's just doing a whole ton of unprecedented stuff.

He's going to average about 25 points this season. There hasn't been an "oldest player" in the NBA to average even 10 points since John Stockton scored 10.8 per game in 2002-03. James is probably going to finish with the highest scoring average of any oldest player ever; Abdul-Jabbar was the league's oldest player when he averaged 23.4 points in 1985-86.

Here's another oldie-but-goodie: James was an All-Star last month. Nobody had been an All-Star in a season where they were the league's oldest player since 1991, when Robert Parish pulled it off.

"It's just been an absolute honor to be able to grace the floor throughout my career and be out there with the greatest players in the world year in and year out," James said in Indianapolis, when he was an All-Star for the 20th time in his 21 seasons.

The NBA couldn't have timed this any better: Lakers vs. Nuggets, national TV, prime-time Saturday night, James nearing a milestone that nobody has ever hit and nobody will again anytime soon – if ever. The funny thing is, he's already reached 40,000 points, depending on how one counts.

Let's explain.

Officially, James has 39,991 points in regular-season games going into Saturday. Unofficially, it could be argued that the real total is 40,015 points (which would have meant that he crossed the 40,000 mark on Thursday). Or maybe even 40,067 points (which would have meant the milestone basket happened Sunday in Phoenix).

He had 24 points on Dec. 9 in the final of the In-Season Tournament, when the Lakers beat Indiana 123-109 for that event's inaugural crown. But that game wasn't a regular-season game, doesn't count in the standings and doesn't count in the stats either.

And he's also scored 52 points in Play-In Tournament games, getting 22 in a win over Golden State in 2021 and 30 against Minnesota in a win last season. Those aren't playoff games, nor are they regular-season games. They just don't count, period.

So, he's already done it. He'll just do it for real on Saturday. Before long, it'll be back to the playoff grind, already in progress, but the moment is one he will appreciate.

"To hit feats and have milestones throughout my career, they all mean something to me. Absolutely," James said. "Obviously, there's a pecking order of which ones are higher than others. But I would be lying to you if I said no, it doesn't mean anything. It absolutely does."

It won't be the last big moment of his career. But nobody knows how many great ones are left for James. And that's why this will be one to savor.

AT A GLANCE

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	42	17	.712	–
Oklahoma City	41	18	.695	1
Denver	41	19	.683	1 ½
L.A. Clippers	37	20	.649	4
Phoenix	35	24	.593	7
New Orleans	35	25	.583	7 ½
Dallas	34	25	.576	8
Sacramento	33	25	.569	8 ½
L.A. Lakers	33	28	.541	10
Golden State	31	27	.534	10 ½
Utah	27	33	.450	15 ½
Houston	25	34	.424	17
Memphis	20	39	.339	22
Portland	15	42	.263	26
San Antonio	12	48	.200	30 ½

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	46	12	.793	–
Cleveland	38	20	.655	8
Milwaukee	39	21	.650	8
New York	35	25	.583	12
Philadelphia	33	25	.569	13
Orlando	34	26	.567	13
Indiana	34	26	.567	13
Miami	33	26	.559	13 ½
Chicago	28	31	.475	18 ½
Atlanta	26	33	.441	20 ½
Brooklyn	23	36	.390	23 ½
Toronto	22	37	.373	24 ½
Charlotte	15	44	.254	31 ½
Detroit	9	49	.155	37
Washington	9	50	.153	37 ½

Thursday's results
Phoenix 110, Houston 105
Milwaukee 111, Charlotte 99
Orlando 115, Utah 107
Brooklyn 124, Atlanta 97
Golden State 110, New York 99
San Antonio 132, Oklahoma City 118
Denver 103, Miami 97
L.A. Lakers 134, Washington 131 (OT)

Friday's results
Charlotte at Philadelphia, late
Cleveland at Detroit, late
Dallas at Boston, late
Golden State at Toronto, late
Indiana at New Orleans, late
Portland at Memphis, late
Sacramento at Minnesota, late
Milwaukee at Chicago, late
Washington at L.A. Clippers, late

Saturday's games
Atlanta at Brooklyn, 2 p.m.
Utah at Miami, 4 p.m.
Portland at Memphis, 7 p.m.
Denver at L.A. Lakers, 7:30 p.m.
Houston at Phoenix, 8 p.m.

Sunday's games
Philadelphia at Dallas, Noon
Golden State at Boston, 2:30 p.m.
L.A. Clippers at Minnesota, 2:30 p.m.
Charlotte at Toronto, 5 p.m.
Detroit at Orlando, 5 p.m.
Indiana at San Antonio, 6 p.m.
New York at Cleveland, 6 p.m.
Oklahoma City at Phoenix, 8:30 p.m.

NOTEBOOK

CURRY, WARRIORS START FAST IN WIN OVER KNICKS

Stephen Curry had 31 points and 11 rebounds, bouncing back from a scoreless first half in his last game with a double-double by the midpoint of this one, and the Golden State Warriors beat the New York Knicks 110-99 on Thursday night.

Jonathan Kuminga added 25 points for the Warriors, who extended their road winning streak to seven games, their longest since winning 11 in a row in the 2018-19 season.

The Warriors raced to a 14-0 lead and never trailed en route to their 10th win in the last 12 games.

NUGGETS OUTLAST HEAT

Michael Porter Jr. had 30 points to help pick up the scoring load after Jamal Murray left because of a sprained ankle, and host Nuggets staved off Miami's fourth-quarter rally to beat the Heat 103-97 on Thursday night.

Porter was 12-of-23 shooting from the floor, including four 3-pointers, and had 11 rebounds to help the Nuggets improve to 5-0 since the All-Star break.

Murray left just before halftime after he sprained his right ankle when he landed on Aaron Gordon's leg after a drive to the basket.

BUCKS THRASH HORNETS

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 24 points and 10 rebounds as the visiting Bucks swept the four-game season series with Charlotte, beating the Hornets 111-99 on Thursday night. Malik Beasley added 19 points — hitting five 3-pointers — and Bobby Portis had 14 points and 10 rebounds. The Bucks shot 16 of 39 from beyond the arc to give coach Doc Rivers his first four-game winning streak with the team.

Wire reports

ROCKETS

From page B1



Rick Scuteri/Associated Press

Jalen Green scored 21 points in the first half Thursday night, more than he's managed across the first two quarters in any of the team's previous six games.

plete a late comeback, he made a season-high seven 3-pointers in 17 attempts.

Green's performance was a major departure from recent weeks. His 21 points in the first half were more than in any of his previous six games. His four 3-pointers in the first half were more than in his previous 11 games.

"The shot was falling," Green said. "I couldn't get no call at the rim, but really just trying to be aggressive."

With the Rockets' offense crumbling, especially on the road, where they face the Suns again Saturday, they can use the scoring from their shooting guard. But Green's high-scoring games have guaranteed little. The Rockets are 3-4 this season when he scores 30 or more points.

Still, there is little the Rockets would welcome more than having Green string together high-scoring games.

"He was being extra aggressive, obviously," Rockets coach Ime Udoka said. "And then he made the shots that he's missed, quite frankly. I love the aggression coming out and attacking."

Green's shooting issues have been as confounding as discouraging.

He has been doing the things that typically get scorers to score again. He has read defenses better. He has been more well-rounded, defending, rebounding and moving the ball better. He put in the work and insisted his confidence had not wavered. But he went into Thursday's game making just 40.6% of his shots, 30.8% of his 3s and was trending in the wrong direction.

"It was good, good to see just for him," Rockets guard Fred VanVleet said. "He really saved us. We had 12 points for most of that first quarter. We had nothing going, no rhythm, no pop, no juice. He got hot and hit a couple 3s. That's the capability of that kid.

"He's an explosive scorer. He carried us offensively tonight for most of the game and hopefully (will) put something together, get some confidence and rhythm and some momentum. But because we need it, obviously, it was good to see."

Green had carried the Rockets when they could get little else to fall. They scored just 17 first-quarter points on 5-of-22 shooting and missed 15 consecutive shots through a stretch of nearly eight minutes before Jeff Green sank a 3. Jalen Green took off in the second quarter, driving the Rockets back from a deficit that reached 21 points and into the game.

His 21-point half was his fifth of at least 20 this season but his first since he scored 20 in the first half against the Pelicans on Jan. 31. He had not scored more than 16 points in any of his previous six games.

The Rockets never shot well enough to complete a comeback. Their 33.7% shooting was their worst this season. Other than Green, they made just four of their 28 3s.

Green went one-on-one more often than Udoka would prefer, though the coach said he was OK with it because "Jalen had it going." He also added five rebounds with his three steals, matching his season high. But if shaken confidence could be as good an explanation for Green's shooting issues as any, having that confidence on display was a welcome sight.

"He had a stretch about a month ago when he went off for five games," Udoka said. "Just want that mindset to carry over, get himself involved. The final piece of that is when he is penetrating, finding the guys. They're not calling a lot of fouls for him at the rim. They do have some length in there. So find the guys there but stay aggressive.

"Hopefully, this is a springboard to something better going forward consistently."

Green averaged 29.8 points on 51.5% shooting in the five-game stretch to which Udoka alluded. In the next 11 games, he averaged just 14.2 points on 37% shooting and 22.2% shooting.

One game spent putting up better numbers does not reverse that, but Green hoped it would be a start, saying he can build on the momentum of Thursday's high scoring.

"I can. I have before," Green said. "I've got to keep rolling. We have 23 games left. I have to roll the table."

Green's breakthrough came on a day he was questionable to play at all. His recovery, he said, came after he "took a lot of medicine, stayed in bed, drank a lot of water, electrolytes and resting."

He also had to overcome the nuisance of torn skin and tape on his left hand, though it did seem to work for him, as if that were what was missing all along.

"It was more the tape," Green said of what bothered him, "but I'll have it there again."

If he can repeat Thursday's scoring often enough, he might never take it off.

Thursday's game

Suns 110, Rockets 105

Houston	17	36	22	30	– 105
Phoenix	33	31	22	24	– 110

HOUSTON	Min	FG M-A	FT M-A	Reb O-T	A	PF	PTS
Brooks	30:42	3-11	0-0	3-8	1	1	6
Smith Jr.	37:13	3-11	4-4	3-16	0	5	11
Sengun	22:42	3-7	2-2	1-3	4	6	8
Ja.Green	39:08	10-28	7-7	0-5	2	2	34
VanVleet	38:33	6-16	7-7	1-6	5	4	21
Whitmore	26:43	5-14	4-4	3-8	0	1	14
Je.Green	12:18	1-4	0-2	1-1	0	0	3
Landale	10:00	2-4	4-5	5-6	0	3	8
Thompson	9:47	0-2	0-0	2-4	0	4	0
Holiday	9:05	0-1	0-0	0-0	2	1	0
Bullock Jr.	3:49	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	2	0
Totals	240:00	33-99	28-31	19-58	14	29	105

Percentages: FG .333, FT .903.
3-Point Goals: 11-45, .244 (Ja.Green 7-17, VanVleet 2-8, Je.Green 1-1, Smith Jr. 1-6, Bullock Jr. 0-1, Sengun 0-1, Whitmore 0-5, Brooks 0-6).
Team Rebounds: 9. Team Turnovers: 1.
Blocked Shots: 5 (Landale 2, Smith Jr., VanVleet, Whitmore).
Turnovers: 12 (Ja.Green 4, Brooks 2, VanVleet 2, Whitmore 2, Sengun, Thompson).
Steals: 8 (Ja.Green 3, Thompson 2, Brooks, Je.Green, Smith Jr.).
Technical Fouls: Whitmore, 6:41 fourth; Sengun, 5:43 fourth; Sengun, 5:43 fourth.

PHOENIX	Min	FG M-A	FT M-A	Reb O-T	A	PF	PTS
Durant	40:25	8-19	7-10	2-7	6	1	24
O'Neale	37:04	3-10	2-2	1-6	7	3	11
Nurkic	27:05	4-10	8-16	5-13	2	6	16
Allen	35:54	2-9	0-0	0-4	0	4	6
Booker	39:14	13-27	3-3	1-7	3	4	35
Bol	25:38	3-6	1-2	1-4	0	3	7
Eubanks	15:47	1-2	2-2	1-7	0	0	4
Okogie	11:18	1-4	0-0	2-2	0	0	3
S.Lee	7:35	1-2	2-2	1-1	2	0	4
Totals	240:00	36-89	25-37	14-51	20	21	110

Percentages: FG .404, FT .676.
3-Point Goals: 13-37, .351 (Booker 6-11, O'Neale 3-9, Allen 2-9, Okogie 1-2, Durant 1-3, Nurkic 0-1, Bol 0-2).
Team Rebounds: 16. Team Turnovers: None.
Blocked Shots: 6 (Nurkic 3, Booker, Eubanks, O'Neale).
Turnovers: 14 (Nurkic 7, Durant 3, Eubanks 2, Booker, O'Neale).
Steals: 6 (O'Neale 3, Booker, Nurkic, Okogie).
Technical Fouls: Booker, 6:41 fourth.
A—17,071 (18,422). T—2:26.

UH BASKETBALL

Ankle injury limits Tugler

By Joseph Duarte
STAFF WRITER

With top-ranked Houston set to visit Oklahoma on Saturday night, coach Kelvin Sampson said JoJo Tugler, a key reserve for the Cougars, has been limited with an injury to his right ankle.

Tugler, a 6-foot-7 freshman forward, had two points in 10 minutes in Tuesday's win over Cincinnati.

During a video conference call with reporters Thursday, Sampson said Tugler's status remains uncertain. If Tugler is limited, Sampson said that could mean an increased role for Cedric Lath, a 6-foot-9 redshirt freshman center.

"Possibility," Sampson said. "We're still evaluating that."

Tugler is averaging 3.8 points and 4.1 rebounds in 16 minutes off the bench for the Cougars (25-3, 12-3 Big 12).

Lath has played in 16 games this season, averaging 2.8 minutes.



Brett Coomer/Staff photographer
UH's Joseph Tugler is averaging 3.8 points per game this season.

UP NEXT

UH AT OKLAHOMA

When/where: 7 p.m. Saturday at Norman, Okla.

TV/radio: ESPN2; 950 AM.

TEXAS A&M BASKETBALL



Sam Craft/Associated Press
Manny Obaseki, right, added a scoring punch off the bench in Texas A&M's 70-68 loss to No. 18 South Carolina on Wednesday, scoring 11 points in just 15 minutes.

Aggies hope Obaseki can provide late spark

By Brent Zwerneman
STAFF WRITER

COLLEGE STATION — One of Texas A&M's lone bright spots during the Aggies' fifth consecutive loss in SEC play goes by "Mo."

"I thought Mo was as good as Mo has been all year long," A&M coach Buzz Williams said of junior guard Manny Obaseki following the Aggies' 70-68 home loss to No. 18 South Carolina on Wednesday night. "He's kind of been on that trajectory ..."

The Aggies also could use some more "Big Mo" — positive momentum — courtesy of Obaseki and with a heavy dose from his teammates following the current losing streak, their longest in two years, that has all but knocked them out of NCAA Tournament consideration. A&M (15-13, 6-9) plays at fellow struggling SEC team Georgia (15-13, 5-10) at 5 p.m. Saturday.

The Aggies close out their regular season Wednesday at home against Mississippi and then at Mississippi on March 9. The SEC tournament begins March 13 in Nashville, Tenn., and at this rate, A&M will need to win the tournament title to earn the league's automatic bid into the NCAA Tournament.

Obaseki only played 15 minutes against the Gamecocks but provided quite a boost off the bench in making 3-of-4 shots from the field and all five of his free throws.

Obaseki was one of three A&M players in double digits (11 points) despite his limited minutes. His energy level typically is unparalleled on the court, as well, especially in driving to the basket.

"He's very gifted at getting fouled," Williams said. "But sometimes in the process of that, too many of us, including me at times, aren't exactly sure what he's doing. That's calmed down ... which is very encouraging, and we'll try to keep that going."

A little more than a year ago, Obaseki was providing the Aggies plenty of spark off the bench when he broke his hand early in SEC play. He wound up playing in only 20 of the Aggies' 35 games last season.

"I missed an important chunk of the season and wasn't sure I was going to be myself again," Obaseki said. "... I had never broken a bone in my body, ever, and I had never been away from the game that long. It did a (number) on me mentally, but I was able to get through it, and here I am now."

A year ago, the vigorous Obaseki, a four-star recruit in the class of 2021 out of John Paul II High School near Dallas, had to truly learn patience in his life for the first time — and he said he learned plenty from the experience.

"It's so easy in this day and age for kids my age, 18 to 23, to get so caught up in, 'What's next, what's next, what's next,' and always want to get that instant result instead of being steadfast in the process and taking it slowly," Obaseki said. "(Williams) has talked to me a lot about being where my feet are and being in the moment, because me and Buzz are similar in that our minds are always going.

"He understands that, and he's always told me I need to slow down, and I need to just be where I'm at right now. To enjoy the moment — and do the best I can in that moment."

The Aggies likely would need to win their final three regular-season games to reach .500 in league play and then win a couple of games in the SEC tournament to reach the NCAA Tournament for a second consecutive season.

They lost in the opening round of the NCAA tourney to Penn State a year ago and are now against the odds in making the tournament after being picked to finish second in the SEC before the season.

UP NEXT

TEXAS A&M AT GEORGIA

When/where: 5 p.m. Saturday at Athena, Ga.

TV/radio: SEC Network; 92.5 FM, 97.5 FM.

THURSDAY'S COLLEGE GAMES

Washington St. rallies past USC

WIRE REPORTS

PULLMAN, Wash. — Isaiah Watts and Andrej Jakimovski scored 18 points each and Myles Rice added 16 to help No. 19 Washington State rally past Southern California, 75-72 on Thursday night.

The Cougars (22-7, 13-5 Pac-12) trailed by 12 points late in the first half and didn't take their first lead until 2:35 remaining on a 3-pointer from Watts, his fifth of the game.

USC freshman Isaiah Collier scored 24 points, but missed a critical free throw with 23 seconds left that would have cut Washington State's lead to two points.

Jaylen Wells then missed two free throws on the other end for Washington State and USC (11-17, 5-12) had one last chance to try and force overtime, but Boogie Ellis and Kobe Johnson missed 3-point attempts in the final seconds.

NO. 17 SAINT MARY'S 83 PEPPERDINE 57

Augustas Marciulionis had 17 points and 11 assists, Luke Barrett added 14 points and the visiting Gaels won the West Coast Conference regular-season championship.

Saint Mary's (24-6, 15-0) extended the nation's longest winning streak to 16 games in wrapping up its first outright regular-season championship since 2012.

NO. 23 GONZAGA 86 SAN FRANCISCO 68

Graham Ike scored 26 points as the visiting Bulldogs clinched a bye into the semifinals of the West Coast Conference tournament.

Gonzaga (23-6, 13-2) won its 29th straight game against San Francisco (22-8, 11-4) to wrap up the No. 2 seed in the conference tournament behind No. 17 Saint Mary's. The top two teams get byes to the semifinals meaning Gonzaga will need to win only two games to win the conference tournament and earn an automatic bid into the NCAA Tournament.

Women

NO. 1 SOUTH CAROLINA 98 ARKANSAS 61

Ashlyn Watkins had 21 points and 11 rebounds to lead the visiting Gamecocks (28-0, 15-0 SEC) past the Razorbacks.

Arkansas (18-12, 6-9) missed its first eight shots from the floor in the first quarter.

NO. 4 STANFORD 67 NO. 11 OREGON STATE 63

Cameron Brink had a career-high 23 rebounds and 25 points as the Cardinal claimed the conference regular-season title.

Brink also had four assists and a blocked shot as Stanford (25-4, 14-3 Pac-12) beat Oregon State (22-6, 11-6) for the 14th straight time.

NO. 17 NOTRE DAME 71 NO. 5 VIRGINIA TECH 58

Freshman Hannah Hidalgo had 23 points and 12 rebounds to lead the host Fighting Irish (22-6, 12-5 Atlantic Coast) past the Hokies.

Virginia Tech (23-5, 14-3) had its 10-game winning streak snapped, but ended up claiming its first ACC regular-season championship outright as No. 12 North Carolina State defeated No. 19 Syracuse 75-71 in overtime on Thursday.

NO. 7 USC 95 ARIZONA 93 (2 OT)

Kayla Padilla hit a tying 3-pointer in the closing seconds of regulation and made another key 3 in the second overtime to lift the host Trojans.

USC (22-5, 12-5) fought back despite star freshman JuJu Watkins fouling out, scoring five points in the final 16 seconds to force overtime.

NO. 8 UCLA 70 ARIZONA STATE 41

Lauren Betts had 20 points and 11 rebounds and Kiki Rice added 14 points for the Bruins (23-5, 12-5 Pac-12).

NO. 9 LSU 80, GEORGIA 54

Angel Reese added another double-double to her season-long list with 17 points and 15 rebounds, for the visiting Tigers (25-4, 12-3 SEC).

TEXANS

From page B1

and someone to complement Tank Dell and Nico Collins. This draft class, experts say, will be deep at wide receiver.

There are several ways the Texans can go.

Most of their needs will be addressed in free agency. So the Texans, coming off their first playoff appearance in four years, don't necessarily have to reach for a position of need at No. 23.

"I think the great thing about the Texans is that they're in a situation where they can take the best available, because I think some players really hit their stride last year," ESPN draft analyst Jordan Reid said. "I think DeMeco put them in a great situation, especially when you find the face of the franchise on both sides."

The Chronicle spoke to Reid and CBS Sports draft analyst Ryan Wilson about what the Texans could do with the 23rd pick. Both think the Texans can potentially come away with a day-one starter.

Wilson said if the Texans are looking for an edge rusher at No. 23, he likes the two Robinsons. Chop Robinson played edge at Penn State, while Darius Robinson is a defensive lineman out of Missouri.



Michael Conroy/Associated Press
Missouri defensive lineman Darius Robinson had an impressive Senior Bowl.

Chop Robinson is slightly undersized at 6-foot-3, 254 pounds.

"He plays bigger than that," Wilson said. "He's got a Will Anderson Jr. motor."

Chop Robinson ran a 4.48 in the 40-yard dash Thursday at the combine, the second-fastest time among defensive linemen.

He had 15 tackles, 7½ tackles for loss, and four sacks in 2023 for Penn State.

Darius Robinson, Wilson said, impressed scouts with his performance at the Senior Bowl. The 6-5, 296-pound lineman had 8½ sacks during the 2023 season.

Both edge rushers said during press conferences at the NFL scouting combine that they had formal meetings with the Texans this week.

Wilson also mentioned Washington's Bralen Trice as an option. Trice is 6-4 and 274 pounds. He had seven sacks in 2023 and 10 in 2022.

Laiatu Latu is expected to be off the board by the time the Texans pick, unless teams don't approve of his medical reports. Latu medically retired when he was at Washington because of a neck injury before resuming his career at UCLA.

When it comes to defensive tackles, Johnny Newton makes the most sense at No. 23. Newton, who said he had a formal interview with the Texans, didn't participate in combine drills because he is coming off foot surgery. He had 7½ sacks in his final season at Illinois.

"There's a little Jeffery Simmons in Johnny Newton's game," Wilson said, referencing the Titans' star defensive tackle. "But he got hurt, and that's why he slipped. I think Simmons was better than Newton, but they are similar type players."



Darron Cummings/AP
Iowa defensive back Cooper Dejean could be available at No. 23.

Other defensive tackle prospects might be better suited for round 2.

Byron Murphy, a 6-1, 308-pound defensive tackle out of Texas, will likely be the first defensive tackle drafted. He had 29 tackles and five sacks. He, too, confirmed he had a formal meeting with the Texans.

"It would mean a lot to get drafted by Houston," Murphy said Wednesday. "Just staying in Texas, I'm familiar with it because I am from Texas. It would mean a lot playing for DeMeco Ryans as a young African-American coach. It would mean a lot to me."

But Wilson and Reid agree that Murphy is expected to be off the board by the time the Texans pick. So they'd have to likely trade up to get him.

As for cornerbacks, Reid likes Alabama's Kool-Aid McKinstry and Clemson's Nate Wiggins, who both confirmed they had formal meetings with the Texans.

The Texans have several players with Alabama ties on their roster. Ryans, who also played at Alabama, tends to favor players who played at big-time college programs because he knows they've been through pressure.

But Reid added that the cornerback depth in this draft class is deep and a possible option the Texans could address on the second day.

Wilson said Newton, Darius Robinson, Wiggins or Iowa cornerback Cooper DeJean would be a home-run pick for the Texans at No. 23.

Reid said Murphy, though likely unavailable, would be a home-run pick for him.

"That interior presence, they don't really have that guy in DeMeco's defense right now," Reid said. "And with him coming over from San Francisco, he's going to want to have different ways to pressure the quarterback. I think they are going to want that. That explosive interior guy is lacking."

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

CAITLIN CLARK

Clark closes in on 'Pistol Pete'

For some, Maravich's career scoring mark cannot be eclipsed by Iowa superstar, or anyone else

By Brett Martel
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BATON ROUGE, La. — LSU's dome-roofed basketball stadium, the Pete Maravich Assembly Center, is named for a supremely crafty, skilled and mesmerizing player who has been known since 1970 for scoring more career points than any man or woman in NCAA history.

That could change within days.

Those who played with, followed or knew the late Maravich sound conflicted about the inevitable moment — likely this Sunday — when "Pistol Pete" is supplanted by Iowa women's basketball sensation Caitlin Clark atop the NCAA's all-time scoring list.

"What Caitlin's done has been amazing. She's fantastic player, great for the women's game and basketball in general," Maravich's eldest son, Jaeson told The Associated Press this week.

Clark's on-court panache — she is a whirlwind and has piled up as many triple-doubles as she has highlight-reel shots — and even her appearance remind Jaeson of his Hall-of-Fame father.

"A lanky build and dark eyes," he said. "And very fun to watch."

He roots for her, but also will regard her career scoring total as "totally separate" from that of his father.

Clark is in her fourth and final season, and if she scores more than 17 points at home against Ohio State on Sunday, she will have surpassed Maravich's 3,667 career points in 130 games.

In 1966, when Maravich arrived at LSU, where his father, Press Maravich, coached, freshmen were not permitted to play for the varsity squad. Maravich's all-time scoring mark was set during just 83 games across three seasons from 1967 to 1970 — and during an era when there was no shot clock, and no 3-point line.

Maravich averaged 44.2 points per game. He scored more than 60 in a game four times, topping out at 69 against Alabama on Feb. 7, 1970.

Former LSU coach Dale Brown noted that recordings of Maravich's games make clear he routinely shot from beyond 20 feet. He and retired Baton Rouge-area sports writer Sam King concluded that Maravich would have averaged about 54 points per game had a 3-point line — adopted by the NCAA in 1986 — existed when he played. Maravich died in 1988 at the age of 40 after collapsing during a pickup basketball game.



Associated Press



Matthew Putney/Associated Press

Pete Maravich, top, scored a record 3,667 points in just 83 games at LSU, playing with a kind of panache that Maravich's son Jaeson sees reflected in the game of Iowa's Caitlin Clark.

"It bothers me a little bit," Brown, who didn't coach Maravich but knew him well, said of Clark inevitably surpassing Maravich on the scoring list. "What he did will never be equaled."

Brown, whose college players at LSU included Shaquille O'Neal and Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf (then known as Chris Jackson), described Maravich as "beyond any imagination."

"I've seen some great players, but I've never seen a better offensive player than him on any level," Brown said. "I coached 44 years and there's never been anyone like him."

Maravich often was described as a magician with the ball, whether he was shooting, dribbling or passing. Some of his college highlights can be found online. He'd switch hands while hanging in the air to get off contested shots — and make them. He'd appear to be dribbling at full speed and suddenly pull-up for a jumper on the wing.

"I don't know how he didn't break his ankles," said former LSU teammate Ralph Jukkola. "You'd sit there scratching your head, thinking, 'How did he do that? I didn't think you could do that with your body.' "

Like Clark, his passes were precise, whether he was flinging the ball the length of the court or whipping a no-look ball behind his back or between his legs.

"If he was looking straight at me, I didn't have to worry about getting the basketball," Jukkola said. "But he may turn, and the split second he turns, the ball may be there."

And he recalled running the floor with Maravich thinking, "That poor defensive guy has no clue what's going to happen."

Jukkola, who was a year ahead of Maravich at LSU, remembered crowds packing arenas for JV games when Maravich was a freshman, and filing out when the varsity squad came out to warm up. After Maravich joined the varsity team, home and road games were almost always packed, and even road crowds would give Maravich standing ovations after some of his circus shots or passes.

At 6-foot-5, Maravich was relatively tall for a guard during his time. If a defender played close, he had the ball-handling skill and explosiveness to get around him, Jukkola said. If a defender backed off, Maravich could shoot over him.

During the 1996-97 basketball season, when the NBA celebrated its 50th anniversary by listing the 50 greatest players in its history, Maravich was included. His sons represented him at an event where players including Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Larry Bird and Isaiah Thomas told them that their father inspired the creativity with which they played.

Johnson told them Pete "was the original Showtime." Bird told them Maravich handled the ball like someone performing yo-yo tricks. Thomas called Maravich the greatest showman in the NBA and most entertaining player he'd ever seen.

Jaeson Maravich, now 44, was a talented scorer at the junior college level, topping out at 55 points in a game. His younger brother, Josh, was a reserve at LSU for three seasons.

Jaeson Maravich is generally eager to discuss his father's legacy, and appreciates that Clark's exploits have given him a chance to do that again, much like last year, when Detroit Mercy star Antoine Davis came within a 3-pointer of matching his father's scoring mark, albeit in 143 games over five seasons.

Jaeson Maravich first saw Clark play during last season's Final Four. He was visiting his mother, Jackie, who was watching Iowa upset top-seeded South Carolina and raving about Clark, who announced Thursday that she will skip her final season of eligibility and enter April's WNBA draft.

"I thought I was going to watch for 2 minutes and it ended up being a lot longer," he recalled.

"I get why the media is making a big deal" of Clark approaching an all-time NCAA points mark that's stood for more than half a century, Jaeson Maravich said. "Fifty-four years is a long time."

COMMENTARY

NCAA has shot to be in step with history

It's time to set record straight by honoring game's AIAW stars

By Sally Jenkins
WASHINGTON POST

The NCAA badly needs a victory, and Iowa's Caitlin Clark is trying to hand it one, if the hole-dwelling gollums who keep the record book will only seize it. Tickets to see Clark's last regular season collegiate game have gone for as much as $877, which seems almost worth it to witness the shot she brandishes with such a combination of darting and languor. The NCAA should honor the architects of that stroke, acknowledge those who built her burgeoning game, and quit claiming false credit.

It's fun to live through a historical phenomenon, isn't it? To witness a performance so sustainedly aerodynamic that it signals a lasting cultural uplift. That's what Clark is accomplishing, as she approaches Pete Maravich's NCAA Division I points record with her logo 3-pointers, all gathered tension and then free unwinding and ruffling of the net. But Clark's performances couldn't come without the elevations of the past, and especially without the surehanded 62-year-old coach Lisa Bluder, one of the original pathfinders of the women's game.

Bluder has kept Clark's head and body so straight in the face of double teams and jersey grabs all year, so consistently in alignment, feet, hips, elbow, wrist and flow.

Yet NCAA record-keepers don't acknowledge women's basketball existed before it took the game over in the 1980s. Exactly when do they think women acquired their knowledge of the game? From online seminars?

"For some reason, the NCAA doesn't want to recognize the basketball that was played prior to 1982, and that's wrong," Bluder said this week, after Clark passed what Bluder called "the real record" for women's major collegiate scoring. That was set by the smoother-than-licorice Lynette Woodard at Kansas from 1978-1981, under the AIAW, before the NCAA deigned to care.

"We played basketball back then," Bluder added. "They just don't want to recognize it. That hurts the rest of us that were playing at that time."

Correcting the record should be the easiest thing in the world. The NCAA can use some goodwill to break its cycle of doom. It should reverse its position, stage a ceremony at the upcoming Final Four to pay tribute to the fall of the "real record." Those pre-1982 generations of women formed the AIAW only because the NCAA did all it could to thwart, suppress and starve them. Rectify the past and give credit where it's deserved — to the people who handed the NCAA such a gift, the polished and popular generation of players exemplified by Clark.

"We aren't talking about this enough," observed ESPN analyst Rebecca Lobo, a transformative player in her own day, on X. "The NCAA should not only acknowledge the records but embrace the AIAW era. It's part of the history of women's basketball (and the right thing to do.)."

Instead, it's been left to Clark herself to pay proper respect. She went out of her way to talk about Woodard and the AIAW after she scored 33 against Minnesota to pass Woodward this week. "I think it just speaks to the foundation that these players have laid for us to have opportunities to be able to play in environments like this, in front of crowds like this," Clark said.

The undergraduate showed a better sense of gratitude and history than any NCAA overlord.

The force of Bluder's remarks on the subject are a clue to the passion she and her coaching colleagues feel about the way the NCAA has blotted out and marred their personal pasts by obstinately clinging to its weird line in the sand. These women had no "coaching trees." No mentors. They learned the game from the floor up as AIAW players, and they picked up strategy from purloined male coaching manuals and playbooks and translated it as best they could to each other.

There won't be a coach or player in this Final Four who wasn't formed, influenced or touched in some way by the AIAW years. Bluder was a three-year starter at Northern Iowa from 1979-1983, after which she took a job at tiny St. Ambrose. She learned to coach by spending her summers working the basketball camps of C. Vivian Stringer, who built Cheyney State into an AIAW powerhouse. The formative years of Stanford's Tara VanDerveer, the career victories leader, were spent as a guard from 1973-1975 at Indiana, where she reached an AIAW Final Four, and in between her own practices would watch Bob Knight's from the bleachers and sketch plays in her notebook.

Then there was one Kim Mulkey, who with a braid like a bullwhip led Louisiana Tech to a 130-6 record and won two national championships: an AIAW title in 1981 and the inaugural NCAA title in 1982, after the men executed a hostile takeover of the game, once they saw it had become a televisable entity on NBC. Mulkey is the only person in college basketball history — men's or women's — to win nattys as a head coach, an assistant coach and a player. But go ahead, whack off half her collegiate accomplishments, simply because she didn't play all four years under the right "governance" body.

The list goes on and on. Blot out the AIAW, and there goes Debbie Ryan, who went almost straight from her playing career as a point guard at Ursinus to a head coaching job at Virginia in 1977, where she merely did the following: In 1981 she gave a promising young guy named Geno Auriemma a start as an assistant coach, and then mentored a point guard named Dawn Staley.

The AIAW was simply a result of enforced penury. That's all it was. Its members lived on the same campuses and played on the same wood floors and shot the same ball as their male NCAA counterparts. "Maybe the NCAA will realize that now," Bluder said. "Maybe it will be brought to their attention, and they will start recognizing those women who played in the '70s."

Maybe that will be another of Clark's lasting contributions to the record book. She not only represents the game's new standard, but she has shined a welcome light on so many past careers and standards, from Woodard's, to Maravich's, to Bluder's. Sports record debates can become reductive shouting, trash-talking bar arguments, but Clark's senior season has seemed like one pleasantly continuous tribute to hoops history.

The NCAA's old guard is always fighting from behind the times. It scrambles to address court storming only after someone gets hurt. It acknowledges NIL rights only after it gets trounced repeatedly in court. It puts more effort into preserving the wrong thing than doing the right one, especially in its chronic maltreatment of women's basketball. This is a chance for the NCAA, for once, to get in step with the flow of history.

DYNAMO

‘Banged up’ start to 2024

Early-season injuries on rise as team attempts to navigate a busy schedule

By Alvaro Montano
STAFF WRITER

The U.S. Soccer Federation announced the participants for the 2024 U.S. Open Cup on Friday, with eight MLS teams including the Dynamo making the list.

The Dynamo, who will be defending their Open Cup championship, will be the only MLS side partaking in all four competitions: MLS regular season, CONCACAF Champions Cup, Leagues Cup and U.S. Open Cup.

With a busy schedule looming, coach Ben Olsen said the Dynamo are trying to get everyone back as soon as possible. Defender Franco Escobar and midfielder Amine Bassi both made their season debuts off the bench in the second half of Tuesday’s 1-0 win against St. Louis in Champions Cup action.

But midfielder Griffin Dorsey, who was helped off the pitch, is considered day-to-day because of an ankle strain, according to Olsen. The Dynamo, who have fielded three different starting lineups in as many games to start the season, will host the New York Red Bulls in MLS action at 7:30 p.m. Saturday.

“We’re going to need everybody, as we’ve done already. We’re a little bit banged up, but so are a lot of teams,” Olsen said. “Some guys are playing themselves back into fitness. It’s really been kind of a puzzle week to week to find out what the right group is from a health standpoint and also tactically how we can get results.”

New York finished with 43 points to place eighth in last year’s Eastern Conference standings and clinched a playoff spot for the 13th consecutive season. Olsen said the Red Bulls look like a much-improved team with a few of their additions.



Marcus Ingram/Getty Images

Dynamo goalkeeper Steve Clark, center top, enters Saturday night’s match with the Red Bulls after recording a clean sheet in Tuesday’s 1-0 win over St. Louis.

The Red Bulls, unbeaten in their last five regular-season road games, are still searching for their first goal of the season under first-year coach Sandro Schwarz after a scoreless draw against Nashville in their MLS season opener. But it wasn’t for a lack of trying.

The Red Bulls dominated the game, outshooting Nashville 17-5 with Swedish midfielder Emil Forsberg leading the way. The team captain was named to the MLS Team of the Matchday Bench after creating six shots and completing 87.5% of his passes in his league debut.

Up top, forwards Elias Manoel and Dante Vanzeir will be eager to start contributing after recording three and two shots, respectively. Swedish defender Noah Eile and forward Roald Mitchell also made their MLS debuts.

Defender John Tolkin was the last player to score a regular-season goal for New York in a 1-0 win over Nashville in October. The Red Bulls suffered a season-ending loss (8-7 on penalty kicks after a 1-1 draw in regulation) against FC Cincinnati in the first round of last season’s playoffs.

“What they do and how they go about it is pretty similar, again, it doesn’t make it easy,” Olsen said. “They’ll be a handful. This will be a tricky one for us. Probably our best test to date, but one we’re looking forward to.”

This will be Houston’s third of four consecutive home matches. The Dynamo will be looking to extend their regular season home unbeaten streak to 14 games. New York leads the all-time regular-season series against the Dynamo with a 12-6-9 record. The Red Bulls own a record of 2-6-5 in Houston, with their last win coming in 2013.

Olsen said it’s been enjoyable to watch midfielders Brooklyn Raines and Jan Gregus, defender Tate Schmitt, who is coming back from an ACL injury, and forward Gabriel Segal, who scored the 1-1 tying goal against Sporting Kansas City in the MLS opener, fit into the group.

Goalkeepers Steve Clark, who recorded his first clean sheet of the season in the second leg against St. Louis, and Carlos Coronel, who collected his 31st career clean sheet against Nashville, will be eyeing another shutout.

“We need points. We want to win at home, entertain the fans and send them home happy, so this is just another opportunity,” Olsen said. “We got to start taking advantage of these home games with three points.”

UP NEXT

DYNAMO VS. NEW YORK RED BULLS

When/where: 7:30 p.m. at Shell Energy Stadium.

TV/radio: Apple TV; 93.3 FM, 1010 AM (Spanish).

SABERCATS

Season begins at home with Utah

By Jack Marrion
STAFF WRITER

The Houston SaberCats begin the 2024 Major League Rugby season at home against the Utah Warriors at 7 p.m. Saturday at SaberCats Stadium.

It is the first of 16 matches for the SaberCats, who seek a third consecutive postseason berth. They set a franchise record for victories during a 10-6 season in 2023, falling in the Western Conference eliminator round to the Seattle Seawolves.

Houston is grouped in the West this season as well, along with Utah, Seattle, the Dallas Jackals, RFC Los Angeles and 2023 MLR finalist San Diego Legion.

RFC Los Angeles relocated from Atlanta. The league added franchises Miami and Anthem Rugby Carolina during the offseason, both competing in the East with defending MLR champion New England.

The SaberCats’ home opener is one of three games on their schedule to be broadcast on Fox Sports 2, including their March 22 match at Seattle and their June 8 home date with Los Angeles.

Houston lost 30-24 and 34-28 to Utah last season. The teams both finished 10-6, with the SaberCats earning the final playoff spot in the Western Conference on points.

The SaberCats re-signed several players from 2023, including all-MLR selections in fly half Davy Coetzer, back row Gideon van Wyk and lock Nathan den Hoedt. Coetzer ranked second in the league with 135 points, with van Wyk’s 10 tries leading the team and ranking fourth in MLR.

Returning starters include prop Robb Cobb, scrum half Carlo de Nysschen, wings Christian Dyer and Gerrie Labuschagne, back row Marno Redelinghuys, center Louritz van der Schyff and fullback Drew Wild.

The SaberCats made a few notable acquisitions during the offseason, including trades that brought lock Johan Momsen and fly half AJ Alatimu to Houston.

Momsen, a first-team MLR selection last year, was acquired with lock Justin Basson from Atlanta in exchange for salary cap considerations.

Alatimu, the leading postseason scorer in MLR history, was traded from Seattle to Houston in exchange for Joe Taufete’e. Alatimu helped the Seawolves defeat the SaberCats in last year’s eliminator.

Houston added veterans with notable international experience during the offseason as well, including prop Maks van Dyk and center Sam Hill and scrum half Andre Warner.

The SaberCats roster includes promising rookies such as fly half Max Schumacher and hooker Seth Smith.

Schumacher was the No. 2 overall selection in the 2023 MLR Draft from the University of California.

Smith, the first MLR player to advance through the SaberCat Player Pathway, graduated from Fulshear High School in 2023 following a successful career in football and wrestling.

2024 SABERCATS SCHEDULE

Saturday: vs. Utah Warriors, 7 p.m. **March 10:** at RFC Los Angeles, 5 p.m. **March 16:** vs. Miami Sharks, 7 p.m. **March 22:** at Seattle Seawolves, 9:30 p.m. **March 29:** at Dallas Jackals, 7:30 p.m. **April 13:** vs. New England Free Jacks, 7 p.m. **April 20:** at Old Glory DC, 3 p.m. **April 27:** vs. San Diego Legion, 7 p.m. **May 4:** at Utah Warriors, 8 p.m. **May 10:** at Anthem RC, 6 p.m. **May 18:** vs. Chicago Hounds, 7 p.m. **June 1:** at NOLA Gold, 5 p.m. **June 8:** vs. RFC Los Angeles, 7 p.m. **June 15:** vs. Seattle Seawolves, 7 p.m. **June 23:** at San Diego Legion, 3 p.m. **June 29:** vs. Dallas Jackals, 7 p.m.

GIRLS BASKETBALL CLASS 5A STATE SEMIFINALS

Randle unable to handle Frisco Liberty

By Dennis Silva II
STAFF WRITER

SAN ANTONIO — Randle entered its Class 5A semifinal against defending state champ Frisco Liberty on Thursday as an underdog in every aspect.

The No. 5 Lions did not have the strength, height or power the No. 2 Redhawks did. They don’t have the reputable talent Liberty has in 6-2 sophomore Jacy Abii, the state’s No. 1 recruit for the Class of 2026 and ranked ninth nationally, or Stephen F. Austin signee Keyera Roseby.

Liberty has the experience. The Redhawks have made the state tournament six times and are seeking their third championship in four years. Randle, which opened three years ago, is in its second year of varsity play.

It all made for a frustrating 66-37 loss for Randle at the Alamodome.

“It’s no secret,” Randle coach Christy Westbrooks said. “Those are some big kids. Being that big, the physicality was more than what we were used to. Being that big, they had the advantage on certain things. Even if we were trying to match the energy, it was just hard when they’re taller than you and more physical than you.”

The Lions, who pride themselves on a frenetic press defense and sharp perimeter shooting, forced 17 turnovers, 14 after falling behind by 21 points at halftime, but made just three of their 18 3-pointers and 10-of-56 shots (17.9%) total.



Ronald Cortes/Contributor

Ifemena Nwora, right, and Randle shot just 17.9% from the floor in their 66-37 loss to Frisco Liberty.

“They did some things against us to frustrate us defensively, they just couldn’t capitalize on it,” Liberty coach Ross Reedy said. “A lot of it has to do with our length. But they put us in some bad spots. All in all, we were physical inside, got out in transition and we were able to stretch it out a little bit.”

The Redhawks (33-7) start three players who stand 5-10 or taller, including two taller than six feet. The Lions do not start a player taller than 5-7.

“They were going to make us play 90 feet and take away our length and our size,” Reedy said. “We couldn’t come into this with an ego. We had to make sure we were physical enough so that when we do get the ball in the halfcourt, we could take advantage of our size on the glass and in the paint.”

Liberty did that. The Redhawks outscored Randle 50-8 in the paint and outrebounded the Lions 51-31. They also held a 14-4 advantage in fast-break points.

Abii was two assists shy of a triple-double. She had a game-high 17 points, 15 in the second half, with 18 rebounds, eight assists and six blocks.

“On every rebound and whenever they could, I noticed two people being sent towards me,” Abii said. “Mostly it was me realizing where the open offensive player was. I noticed a lot of doubles and constant pressure. There was no breathing room.”

Three other Liberty players scored in double figures: Roseby had 13 points and eight rebounds, junior Aziyah Farrier had 12 points and six assists and junior Lilian Johnson had 13 points and eight rebounds.

Still, the game did not take away from an outstanding season for Randle, which finished 30-9.

Just a year ago, the Lions had to win a tiebreaker for the fourth and final playoff spot in their district.

“It’s incredible,” said junior guard Alaysia Cook, who tied sophomore Kurynn McNeill for the team lead in scoring with 13 points to go with five steals. “We put in all this work to get here, and it’s incredible to show it on this stage.”

Before Thursday, Randle, which entered on a 21-game win streak, had defeated its playoff opponents by an average of 26.2 points per game before running into a titan.

“Obviously it didn’t fare out the way we would like, but the fight in these girls, I’m extremely proud of,” Westbrooks said. “We have been outmanned, outsized, underrated. We’re never at the top of anybody’s list, and to go out the way we did, for me, I’m very proud. For us, even losing that game was going out on top.”

PLAYOFF RESULTS/PAIRINGS

Girls

State tournament

All games played at the Alamodome, San Antonio

Class 6A
Semifinals
Summer Creek (35-3) vs. Duncanville (36-4), late
South Grand Prairie (32-3) vs. San Antonio Brennan (32-3), late
Championship
TBD, 8:30 p.m. Saturday

Class 5A
Semifinals
Frisco Liberty 66, Randle 37
Mansfield Timberview 67, Cedar Park 45
Championship
Frisco Liberty vs. Mansfield Timberview, 3 p.m. Saturday

Class 4A
Semifinals
Waco La Vega 65, Dallas Lincoln 60 (2OT)
Boerne (34-4) vs. Canyon (29-6), late
Championship
Waco La Vega vs. TBD, 7 p.m. Saturday

Class 3A
Semifinals
Huntington 47, Colmbus 33
Shallowater 59, Rains 47
Championship
Huntington (36-6) vs. Shallowater (27-12), 10 a.m. Saturday

Class 2A
Semifinals
Martin ' s Mill 54, Goldthwaite 43
Nocona 44, Wellington 42
Championship
Martin ' s Mill vs. Nocona, 1:30 p.m. Saturday

Class 1A
Semifinals
Newcastle 59, Westbrook 37
Turkey Valley 54, Neches 41
Championship
Newcastle (34-1) vs. Turkey Valley (37-2), 8:30 a.m. Saturday

Boys

Regional tournament

Class 6A
Region II
Semifinals
Rockwall (20-14) vs. Nimitz (25-12), late
Cypress Ranch (27-11) vs. Mansfield Lake Ridge (30-6), late
Championship
1 p.m. Saturday, Lufkin Panther Activity Center
Region III
Semifinals
Seven Lakes (36-2) vs. Beaumont United (32-3), late
Bellaire (30-6) vs. Clear Springs (27-9), late
Championship
2 p.m. Saturday, Campbell Center

Class 5A
Region III
Semifinals
Fort Bend Marshall (33-2) vs. Killeen Shoemaker (30-8), late
Port Arthur Memorial (30-8) vs. Killeen Ellison (32-5), late
Championship
1 p.m. Saturday, Berry Center

Class 4A
Region III
Semifinals
Wheatley (23-6) vs. Silsbee (26-9), late
Washington (26-4) vs. Tyler Chapel Hill (30-4), late
Championship
1 p.m. Saturday, Bryan HS
Region IV
Semifinals
Stafford (33-6) vs. Bishop (29-9), late
Iowa Colony (24-14) vs. Somerset (26-11), late
Championship
3 p.m. Saturday, Texas A&M-Kingsville

Class 3A
Region III
Semifinals
Hitchcock (31-3) vs. Lorena (26-9), late
Palestine Westwood (26-8) vs. Kountze (34-5), late
Championship
1 p.m. Saturday, Waco Midway HS

TAPPS

Girls state tournament

Class 6A
Semifinals
Dallas Ursuline Academy 62, The Village School 41
Dallas Bishop Lynch 42, San Antonio Antonian Prep 41
Championship
Dallas Ursuline Academy vs. Dallas Bishop Lynch, late

Class 5A
Semifinals
Southwest Christian 48, Argyle Liberty Christian 46
Second Baptist 54, San Antonio St. Mary’s Hall 50
Championship
Southwest Christian 63, Second Baptist 58

Class 4A
Semifinals
Fort Worth Lake Country Christian 43, Arlington Grace Prep 27
Bay Area Christian 60, Boerne Geneva 41
Championship
Fort Worth Lake Country Christian 56, Bay Area Christian 50

Class 3A
Semifinals
Lubbock Christian 57, Amarillo San Jacinto Christian 29
Rosehill Christian 55, Bryan Brazos Christian 48
Championship
Rosehill Christian vs. Lubbock Christian, late

Class 2A
Semifinals
Conroe Covenant 48, Dallas First Baptist 44
Lubbock Southcrest Christian 49, Ovilla Christian 41
Championship
Conroe Covenant 50, Lubbock Southcrest Christian 37

Class 1A
Championship
Harvest Christian 78, Texoma Christian 27

Boys state tournament

Class 6A
Semifinals
Plano Prestonwood Christian vs. Dallas Parish Episcopal, late
San Antonio Antonian Prep vs. Plano John Paul II, late
Championship
TBD, 4 p.m. Saturday, Robinson HS

Class 5A
Semifinals
Austin St. Michael’s vs. Midland Christian, late
Second Baptist vs. The Woodlands Christian, late
Championship
TBD, 1:30 p.m. Saturday, Robinson HS

Class 4A
Semifinals
Arlington Grace Prep 48, Lubbock Trinity Christian 39
St. Thomas’ Episcopal 78, Austin Brentwood Christian 75
Championship
Arlington Grace Prep vs. St. Thomas’ Episcopal, 11 a.m. Saturday, Robinson HS

Class 3A
Semifinals
St. Francis 58, Westbury Christian 37
Lubbock Christian 58, Tyler Bishop Gorman 47
Championship
St. Francis 61, Lubbock Christian 53

Class 2A
Semifinals
Dallas First Baptist 34, Galveston O’Connell 31
Fort Worth Bethesda Christian 52, Fort Worth Christian Life 49
Championship
Fort Worth Bethesda Christian 48, Dallas First Baptist 33

Class 1A
Semifinals
Angelo Cornerstone Christian 57, Founders Christian 53
DeSoto King. Prep 43, Prosper Prestonwood Christian 37
Championship
DeSoto King. Prep 59, Angelo Cornerstone Christian 58

FOR THE RECORD

SCOREBOARD

Odds

Home team capitalized

NBA

Saturday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
BROOKLYN	2	221 ½	Atlanta
MIAMI	OFF	OFF	Utah
MEMPHIS	OFF	OFF	Portland
LA LAKERS	OFF	OFF	Denver
PHOENIX	OFF	OFF	Houston

College basketball

Saturday

FAVORITE	LINE	UNDERDOG
SOUTH CAROLINA	1 ½	Florida
PROVIDENCE	1 ½	Villanova
WISCONSIN	2 ½	Illinois
BAYLOR	4 ½	Kansas
KENTUCKY	12 ½	Arkansas
TEXAS	10 ½	Oklahoma State
ARIZONA	13 ½	Oregon
CREIGHTON	4 ½	Marquette
MINNESOTA	5 ½	Penn State
AUBURN	9 ½	Mississippi State
CHARLOTTE	3	South Florida
Iowa State	3 ½	UCF
NORTH CAROLINA	11 ½	NC State
NORTHWESTERN	2 ½	Iowa
Wake Forest	1 ½	VIRGINIA TECH
RICHMOND	2 ½	VCU
DUKE	8 ½	Virginia
Texas Tech	3 ½	WEST VIRGINIA
CINCINNATI	5 ½	Kansas State
WASHINGTON ST.	6 ½	UCLA
Clemson	7 ½	NOTRE DAME
BOISE STATE	2 ½	New Mexico
ALABAMA	PK	Tennessee
PURDUE	9 ½	Michigan State
Houston	5 ½	OKLAHOMA
BYU	5 ½	TCU
SAINT MARY'S (CA)	2 ½	Gonzaga

NHL

Saturday

FAVORITE	LINE	UNDERDOG	LINE
CAROLINA	-142	Winnipeg	+118
Florida	-154	at DETROIT	+128
Edmonton	-154	at SEATTLE	+128
Minnesota	-126	at ST. LOUIS	+105
Colorado	-142	at NASHVILLE	+118
PHILADELPHIA	-128	Ottawa	+106
TAMPA BAY	-235	Montreal	+190
Vegas	-118	at BUFFALO	-102
TORONTO	-125	N.Y Rangers	+104
Boston	-126	at N.Y ISLANDERS	+105
DALLAS	-480	San Jose	+360
Columbus	-126	at CHICAGO	+105
CALGARY	-128	Pittsburgh	+106

Baseball

MLB spring training

Thursday's results

Houston 2, N.Y. Mets 1
Boston 5, Detroit 2
Atlanta (ss) 5, Minnesota 0
Baltimore 9, Pittsburgh 8
Atlanta (ss) 12, Tampa Bay 9
Washington 3, St. Louis 1
Philadelphia 5, Toronto 0
San Diego 5, Oakland 3
Chicago White Sox (ss) 6, Kansas City 1
Texas 7, Milwaukee 5
Colorado 10, Chicago Cubs 9
L.A. Angels 4, Cleveland 1
Chicago White Sox (ss) 6, Seattle 5
Arizona 2, San Francisco 1
Miami 0, N.Y. Yankees 0
Cincinnati 5, L.A. Dodgers 4

Friday's results

Houston 10, Washington 8
Detroit 4, Philadelphia (ss) 2
Baltimore 3, Atlanta 1
Minnesota 5, Boston 3
Pittsburgh 12, Tampa Bay 8
St. Louis 3, N.Y. Mets 2
Miami 6, Philadelphia (ss) 6
Kansas City 5, Oakland 4
San Francisco 11, Texas 5
Chicago Cubs 10, Chicago White Sox 6
L.A. Angels 5, San Diego (ss) 3
Colorado 10, Seattle 9
Milwaukee 4, San Diego (ss) 3
N.Y. Yankees vs Toronto at Tampa, Fla., late
L.A. Dodgers vs Cleveland at Phoenix, late
Cincinnati vs Arizona at Goodyear, Ariz., late

Saturday's games

Baltimore vs N.Y. Yankees, 12:05 p.m.
Boston (ss) vs Washington, 12:05 p.m.
Detroit vs Pittsburgh, 12:05 p.m.
Houston vs St. Louis, 12:05 p.m.
Philadelphia vs Minnesota, 12:05 p.m.
Tampa Bay vs Boston (ss), 12:05 p.m.
Toronto vs Atlanta, 12:07 p.m.
Miami vs N.Y. Mets, 12:10 p.m.
Cleveland vs Kansas City, 2:05 p.m.
Texas vs Chicago White Sox, 2:05 p.m.
L.A. Dodgers (ss) vs Chicago Cubs, 2:05 p.m.
San Francisco vs San Diego, 2:05 p.m.
L.A. Angels vs Arizona, 2:10 p.m.
Seattle vs Oakland, 2:10 p.m.
Colorado vs Cincinnati, 2:10 p.m.
Milwaukee vs L.A. Dodgers (ss), 2:10 p.m.

Colleges

Baseball

Thursday's results

Eastern Michigan 14, Houston Christian 4

Friday's results

Texas State 8, Houston 7
Kansas 11, Texas Southern 2
No. 5 TCU 9, USC 8 (11)

Men's basketball

Thursday's results

EAST

Albany (NY) 91, New Hampshire 67
Binghamton 76, Maine 74 (OT)
CCSU 78, LIU 64
Delaware 73, Northeastern 67
Drexel 90, Stony Brook 86
Le Moyne 70, Wagner 56
Mass.-Lowell 89, Bryant 67
Merrimack 74, Fairleigh Dickinson 55
Rutgers 82, Michigan 52
Sacred Heart 79, Stonehill 51
UMBC 79, NJIT 60

SOUTH

Coll. of Charleston 96, Campbell 73
Elon 76, William & Mary 71
Gardner-Webb 72, Longwood 69
Hampton 64, Monmouth (NJ) 56
Hofstra 69, UNC-Wilmington 58
Liberty 83, New Mexico St. 58
Memphis 82, East Carolina 58
Morehead St. 72, SE Missouri 50
Towson 84, NC A&T 58
UT Martin 80, Tennessee Tech 69
UTEP 72, Jacksonville St. 65

MIDWEST

Lindenwood (Mo.) 67, S. Indiana 63
Ohio St. 78, Nebraska 69
S. Dakota St. 72, North Dakota 62
South Dakota 88, N. Dakota St. 68
St. Thomas (MN) 88, Omaha 61
W. Illinois 70, E. Illinois 66

SOUTHWEST

UALR 85, Tennessee St. 60

WEST

Abilene Christian 77, S. Utah 68
CS Bakersfield 70, UC San Diego 57
Cal St.-Fullerton 76, Long Beach St. 71
E. Washington 89, Montana 79
Gonzaga 86, San Francisco 68
Grand Canyon 72, Texas Rio Grande Valley 43
Loyola Marymount 96, San Diego 62
Montana St. 62, Idaho 48
N. Arizona 92, Idaho St. 88 (2OT)
Portland 80, Santa Clara 75 (OT)
Saint Mary's (Cal.) 83, Pepperdine 57
Stephen F. Austin 62, Cal Baptist 60 (OT)
Tarleton St. 85, Utah Tech 74
Texas-Arlington 82, Seattle 62
UC Davis 75, Hawaii 63
UC Irvine 89, CS Northridge 64
UC Santa Barbara 83, Cal Poly 75
UMKC 84, Denver 69
Utah 90, Stanford 68
Washington 94, UCLA 77
Washington St. 75, Southern Cal 72
Weber St. 85, N. Colorado 81 (OT)

Women's basketball

Thursday's results

EAST

Albany (NY) 45, New Hampshire 40
Boston College 78, North Carolina 74
Bryant 60, Mass.-Lowell 51
CCSU 65, LIU Brooklyn 56
Delaware St. 57, Morgan St. 53
Fairfield 64, Quinnipiac 46
Fairleigh Dickinson 71, Merrimack 63
Iona 71, Canisius 58
Le Moyne 55, Wagner 46
Maine 57, Binghamton 51
Maryland 79, Wisconsin 63
Mount St. Mary's 58, Manhattan 43
NJIT 77, UMBC 76 (OT)
Niagara 75, Rider 56

SOUTH

Alabama 76, Florida 73
Auburn 77, Mississippi St. 60
Austin Peay 63, E. Kentucky 55
Chattanooga 60, Furman 53
Clemson 68, Wake Forest 64
Duke 73, Virginia 54
Florida Gulf Coast 75, North Florida 33
LSU 80, Georgia 54
Louisville 70, Florida St. 55
McNeese St. 72, Houston Christian 64
Miami 62, Pittsburgh 44
Mississippi 75, Kentucky 45
NC State 75, Syracuse 71 (OT)
Northwestern St. 55, Nicholls 47
SE Missouri 70, Morehead St. 63
Stetson 55, Jacksonville 51
Tennessee 75, Texas A&M 66
UT Martin 67, Tennessee Tech 37
Wofford 75, ETSU 64

MIDWEST

Bellarmine 80, Lipscomb 74
Denver 74, UMKC 60
Detroit 64, IUPUI 59
Drake 84, Ill. Chicago 63
Grand Canyon 66, Texas Rio Grande Valley 40
Illinois St. 75, S. Illinois 66 (OT)
Michigan St. 87, Illinois 70
Missouri St. 70, Bradley 44
N. Dakota St. 63, South Dakota 54
N. Iowa 78, Valparaiso 59
Notre Dame 71, Virginia Tech 58
Oakland 84, Wright St. 82 (2OT)
Omaha 79, St. Thomas (MN) 62
S. Dakota St. 103, North Dakota 47
S. Indiana 75, Lindenwood (Mo.) 38
Vanderbilt 68, Missouri 61
W. Illinois 64, E. Illinois 54

SOUTHWEST

Abilene Christian 75, S. Utah 42
Cal Baptist 100, Stephen F. Austin 96 (OT)
Incarnate Word 53, SE Louisiana 51
Lamar 74, Texas A&M Commerce 58
Seattle 81, Texas-Arlington 77
South Carolina 98, Arkansas 61
Tarleton St. 76, Utah Tech 60
Texas A&M-CC 81, New Orleans 54
UALR 68, Tennessee St. 46
UTEP 70, Jacksonville St. 48

WEST

Cal Poly 73, UC Santa Barbara 64
California 62, Oregon 59
Colorado 68, Washington 62
E. Washington 56, Montana 55
Idaho 58, Montana St. 53
Liberty 60, New Mexico St. 56
Long Beach St. 74, Cal St.-Fullerton 59
N. Arizona 89, Idaho St. 74
N. Colorado 72, Weber St. 64
Pacific 82, San Diego 62
San Francisco 78, Saint Mary's (Cal) 74 (OT)
Santa Clara 86, Loyola Marymount 45
Southern Cal 95, Arizona 93 (2OT)
Stanford 67, Oregon St. 63
UCLA 70, Arizona St. 41
Utah 82, Washington St. 67

ON THE AIR

Television

AHL	Syracuse at Toronto	NHL	3 p.m.
Auto racing	Formula One: Race	ESPN	9 a.m.
Auto racing	NASCAR Cup: Qualifying	FS1	1 p.m.
Auto racing	NASCAR Xfinity: Race	FS1	4 p.m.
Col. baseball	Astros Foundation College Classic: Houston vs. Vanderbilt	SCHN	11 a.m.
Col. baseball	Florida at Miami	ACC	2 p.m.
Col. baseball	Astros Foundation College Classic: Texas vs. Texas St.	SCHN	3 p.m.
Col. baseball	Astros Foundation College Classic: Louisiana-Lafayette vs. LSU	MLB, SCHN	7 p.m.
Col. basketball	Colgate at Lehigh	CBSSN	11 a.m.
Col. basketball	Florida at South Carolina	ESPN	11 a.m.
Col. basketball	Florida St. at Georgia Tech	ESPN2	11 a.m.
Col. basketball	Tulane at Florida Atlantic	ESPNU	11 a.m.
Col. basketball	Villanova at Providence	Fox	11 a.m.
Col. basketball	Butler at DePaul	FS1	11 a.m.
Col. basketball	Florida at South Carolina	SEC	11 a.m.
Col. basketball	Kansas at Baylor	ABC	noon
Col. basketball	Illinois at Wisconsin	Big Ten	noon
Col. basketball	Arkansas at Kentucky	CBS	12:30 p.m.
Col. basketball	Towson at N. Carolina-Wilmington	CBSSN	1 p.m.
Col. basketball	Oregon at Arizona	ESPN	1 p.m.
Col. basketball	Oklahoma St. at Texas	ESPN2	1 p.m.
Col. basketball	Dayton at Loyola-Chicago	ESPNU	1 p.m.
Col. basketball	Southern Cal at Arizona St. (w)	Pac-12	1 p.m.
Col. basketball	Marquette at Creighton	Fox	1:30 p.m.
Col. basketball	Massachusetts at Davidson	USA	1:30 p.m.
Col. basketball	Penn St. at Minnesota	Big Ten	2:15 p.m.
Col. basketball	LSU at Vanderbilt	SEC	2:30 p.m.
Col. basketball	Southern Cal at Washington	CBS	3 p.m.
Col. basketball	Saint Louis at Rhode Island	CBSSN	3 p.m.
Col. basketball	N. Carolina St. at N. Carolina	ESPN	3 p.m.
Col. basketball	Mississippi St. at Auburn	ESPN2	3 p.m.
Col. basketball	CIAA tournament: Final	ESPNU	3 p.m.
Col. basketball	Stanford at Oregon (w)	Pac-12	4 p.m.
Col. basketball	Iowa at Northwestern	Big Ten	4:30 p.m.
Col. basketball	Wake Forest at Virginia Tech	CW	4:30 p.m.
Col. basketball	Pittsburgh at Boston College	ACC	5 p.m.
Col. basketball	Va. Commonwealth at Richmond	CBSSN	5 p.m.
Col. basketball	Virginia at Duke	ESPN	5 p.m.
Col. basketball	Texas Tech at W steVirginia	ESPN2	5 p.m.
Col. basketball	Wisconsin-Green Bay at Wisconsin-Milwaukee	ESPNU	5 p.m.
Col. basketball	Texas A&M at Georgia	SEC	5 p.m.
Col. basketball	UCLA at Washington St.	Pac-12	6 p.m.
Col. basketball	Xavier at Georgetown	FS1	6:30 p.m.
Col. basketball	Clemson at Notre Dame	CW	6:45 p.m.
Col. basketball	Syracuse at Louisville	ACC	7 p.m.
Col. basketball	New Mexico at Boise St.	CBSSN	7 p.m.
Col. basketball	Tennessee at Alabama	ESPN	7 p.m.
Col. basketball	Houston at Oklahoma	ESPN2	7 p.m.
Col. basketball	Middle Tennessee at Sam Houston St.	ESPNU	7 p.m.
Col. basketball	Michigan St. at Purdue	Fox	7 p.m.
Col. basketball	BYU at Texas (w)	LHN	7 p.m.
Col. basketball	Mississippi at Missouri	SEC	7:30 p.m.
Col. basketball	California at Utah	Pac-12	8 p.m.
Col. basketball	San Jose St. at UNLV	CBSSN	9 p.m.
Col. basketball	Gonzaga at Saint Mary's	ESPN	9 p.m.
Col. basketball	Long Beach St. at California-Irvine	ESPN2	9 p.m.
Col. basketball	Stephen F. Austin at Grand Canyon	ESPNU	9 p.m.
Col. hockey	Michigan at Minnesota	Big Ten	7:30 p.m.
Col. lacrosse	Notre Dame at North Carolina (w)	ACC	10 a.m.
Col. lacrosse	Johns Hopkins at Virginia	ACC	noon
Col. softball	Hofstra at Texas	LHN	3 p.m.
Col. water polo	UCLA at Indiana (w)	Big Ten	10 a.m.
Fishing	Bassmaster Elite: at Lake Fork	FS1	7 a.m.
Golf	PGA: Cognizant Classic	Golf NBC	noon 2 p.m.
Golf	LPGA: Women's World Championship	Golf	8:30 p.m.
Horse racing	America's Day at the Races	FS2	2 p.m.
Horse racing	1/ST Racing: Gulfstream Park	CNBC	4 p.m.
MLB	Spring training: Baltimore vs. N.Y. Yankees	MLB	noon
NBA	Utah at Miami	NBA	4 p.m.
NBA	Denver at L.A. Lakers	ABC	7:30 p.m.
NBA	Rockets at Phoenix	SCHN	8 p.m.
NFL	Scouting Combine	NFL	noon
NHL	Winnipeg at Carolina	NHL	11:30 a.m.
NHL	Florida at Detroit	ABC	2 p.m.
NHL	San Jose at Dallas	BSSW	7 p.m.
Rodeo	Rodeo Houston: Super Series II (Round 2)	BSSW	3 p.m.
Rugby	MLR: SaberCats at Utah	FS2	7 p.m.
Rugby	NRL: South Sydney at Manly-Warringah	FS1	8:30 p.m.
Rugby	NRL: Brisbane at Sydney	FS1	10:30 p.m.
Soccer	West Ham at Everton	USA	9 a.m.
Soccer	Aston Villa at Luton Town	USA	11:30 a.m.
Soccer	MLS: Orlando City at Miami	Fox	3:30 p.m.
Soccer	Everton at Manchester City (w)	CBSSN	6 a.m.
Tennis	ATP: Dubai Championships	Tennis	9 a.m.
Tennis	ATP: Chile Open	Tennis	3 p.m.
Tennis	WTA: ATX Open	Tennis	3 p.m.
Tennis	ATP: Mexican Open	Tennis	3 p.m.
Tennis	WTA: San Diego Open	Tennis	3 p.m.
Radio			
Col. basketball	Oklahoma St. at Texas	950 AM	1 p.m.
Col. basketball	Marquette at Creighton	610 AM	1:30 p.m.
Col. basketball	Jackson St. at Texas Southern (w)	90.9 FM	3 p.m.
Col. basketball	Texas A&M at Georgia	92.5 FM 97.5 FM	5 p.m.
Col. basketball	Jackson St. at Texas Southern	90.9 FM	5 p.m.
Col. basketball	Tennessee at Alabama	610 AM	7 p.m.
Col. basketball	Houston at Oklahoma	950 AM	7 p.m.
MLB	Spring training: Astros vs. St. Louis	790 AM	noon
NBA	Rockets at Phoenix In Spanish	790 AM 104.9 FM HD-2	8 p.m.
Soccer	N.Y. Red Bulls at Dynamo (Spanish)	93.3 FM, 1010 AM	7:30 p.m

Golf

PGA Tour

Cognizant Classic in The Palm Beaches

At Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.
Yardage: 7,147; Par: 71

Thursday's first round

Chad Ramey	30-34—64
Seonghyeon Kim	32-32—64
Austin Eckroat	31-34—65
Chesson Hadley	32-33—65
Ryan Moore	33-32—65
Andrew Novak	33-32—65
David Skinns	33-32—65
Cameron Young	31-34—65
Kevin Yu	34-32—66
Erik Van Rooyen	30-36—66
Bud Cauley	30-36—66
Billy Horschel	33-33—66
C.T. Pan	34-32—66
Chandler Phillips	32-34—66
Sam Ryder	33-33—66
Min Woo Lee	36-31—67
Nicolas Echavarria	36-31—67
Victor Perez	36-31—67
Byeong Hun An	35-32—67
Nick Dunlap	33-34—67
Garrick Higgo	35-32—67
Chris Kirk	35-32—67
Shane Lowry	33-34—67
Rory McIlroy	34-33—67
Matthew NeSmith	33-34—67
Alex Noren	31-36—67
Matthieu Pavon	33-34—67
Davis Thompson	35-32—67
Tom Whitney	33-34—67
Tyson Alexander	32-36—68
Tom Kim	34-34—68
Martin Laird	33-35—68
Joseph Bramlett	32-36—68
Robert Macintyre	35-33—68
Doug Ghim	33-35—68
Lucas Glover	33-35—68
Harry Hall	35-33—68
Ryo Hisatsune	34-34—68
J.B. Holmes	35-33—68
Mark Hubbard	36-32—68
Jake Knapp	36-32—68
David Lipsky	34-34—68
Peter Malnati	33-35—68
Troy Merritt	33-35—68
Keith Mitchell	34-34—68
Ben Silverman	33-35—68
Sepp Straka	33-35—68
Carson Young	33-35—68
Daniel Berger	35-33—68
Kevin Dougherty	33-35—68
Ben Taylor	35-33—68
Ryan Fox	33-36—69
Justin Rose	34-35—69
Alexander Bjork	35-34—69
Ryan Brehm	35-34—69
Hayden Buckley	32-37—69
Corey Conners	36-33—69
Parker Coody	33-36—69
Rico Hoey	35-34—69
Beau Hossler	34-35—69
Chan Kim	35-34—69
Ben Kohles	34-35—69
Kyoung-Hoon Lee	34-35—69
J.T. Poston	35-34—69
Jimmy Stanger	34-35—69
Justin Suh	34-35—69
Camilo Villegas	32-37—69
Taylor Pendrith	35-34—69
Denny McCarthy	34-35—69
Cameron Champ	36-33—69
Greyson Sigg	35-35—70
Tom Hoge	37-33—70
Christiaan Bezuidenhout	34-36—70
Chris Crawford	35-35—70
Matt Fitzpatrick	36-34—70

LPGA Tour

HSBC Women's World Championship

At Sentosa Island, Singapore
Yardage: 6,775; Par: 72

Friday's second round

Celine Boutier	73-64—137
Ayaka Furue	71-67—138
Madelene Sagstrom	71-68—139
Peiyun Chien	72-68—140
Nasa Hataoka	71-69—140
Hyo Joo Kim	70-70—140
Stephanie Kyriacou	71-69—140
Sarah Schmelzel	68-72—140
Aditi Ashok	72-69—141
Hye Jin Choi	71-70—141
Hannah Green	74-67—141
Brooke Henderson	75-66—141
Hae-Ran Ryu	72-69—141
Patty Tavatanakit	73-68—141
Linn Grant	69-73—142
Esther Henseleit	69-73—142
Mi Hyang Lee	73-69—142
Andrea Lee	70-72—142
Jenny Shin	71-71—142
Jasmine Suwannapura	73-69—142
In Gee Chun	70-73—143
Allisen Corpuz	71-72—143
Gemma Dryburgh	72-71—143
Lilia Vu	69-74—143
Chanettee Wannasaen	70-73—143
Ruoning Yin	71-72—143
Ariya Jutanugarn	72-72—144
Sei Young Kim	77-67—144
Jin Young Ko	71-73—144
Yuna Nishimura	71-73—144
Elizabeth Szokol	75-69—144
Amy Yang	71-73—144
Pajaree Anannarukarn	73-72—145
Grace Kim	74-71—145
Minjee Lee	74-71—145
Lydia Ko	76-70—146
Alexa Pano	74-72—146
Carlota Ciganda	74-73—147
Perrine Delacour	74-73—147
Sarah Kemp	75-72—147
A Lim Kim	75-72—147
Yu Liu	77-70—147
Gaby Lopez	74-73—147
Leona Maguire	70-77—147
Anna Nordqvist	74-73—147
Bianca Pagdanganan	71-76—147
Albane Valenzuela	71-76—147

Hockey

NHL

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Florida	60	40	16	4	84	198	145
Boston	61	35	12	14	84	207	169
Toronto	59	34	17	8	76	220	187
Detroit	60	33	21	6	72	216	191
Tampa Bay	62	32	24	6	70	210	210
Buffalo	60	28	28	4	60	174	180
Montreal	60	23	28	9	55	170	215
Ottawa	57	25	29	3	53	190	203
Metropolitan	**GP**	**W**	**L**	**OT**	**Pts**	**GF**	**GA**
N.Y. Rangers	60	40	17	3	83	201	164
Carolina	60	36	18	6	78	198	167
Philadelphia	60	31	22	7	69	183	177
New Jersey	59	30	25	4	64	198	205
N.Y. Islanders	59	25	20	14	64	175	200
Washington	58	27	22	9	63	153	186
Pittsburgh	57	27	22	8	62	170	156
Columbus	59	19	30	10	48	173	218

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Central	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Dallas	62	36	17	9	81	222	188
Winnipeg	58	37	16	5	79	177	139
Colorado	61	37	19	5	79	226	189
Nashville	61	34	25	2	70	194	189
St. Louis	59	30	26	3	63	171	185
Minnesota	60	28	26	6	62	189	202
Arizona	59	23	31	5	51	170	196
Chicago	60	15	40	5	35	123	213
Pacific	**GP**	**W**	**L**	**OT**	**Pts**	**GF**	**GA**
Vancouver	62	38	17	7	83	222	175
Vegas	60	33	20	7	73	196	172
Edmonton	57	35	20	2	72	204	170
Los Angeles	59	30	19	10	70	183	161
Calgary	59	29	25	5	63	185	184
Seattle	59	26	22	11	63	165	169
Anaheim	59	21	35	3	45	157	211
San Jose	58	15	38	5	35	124	228

NOTE: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss.

Thursday's results

Carolina 4, Columbus 2
N.Y. Islanders 5, Detroit 3
Toronto 4, Arizona 2
Buffalo 3, Tampa Bay 2 (OT)
Boston 5, Vegas 4
Florida 4, Montreal 3 (SO)
Dallas 4, Winnipeg 1
Nashville 6, Minnesota 1
Colorado 5, Chicago 0
Los Angeles 5, Vancouver 1
Seattle 2, Pittsburgh 0
Anaheim 6, San Jose 4

Friday's results

Arizona at Ottawa, late
Philadelphia at Washington, late
New Jersey at Anaheim, late

Saturday's games

Winnipeg at Carolina, 11:30 a.m.
Florida at Detroit, 2 p.m.
Edmonton at Seattle, 3 p.m.
Colorado at Nashville, 5 p.m.
Minnesota at St. Louis, 5 p.m.
Montreal at Tampa Bay, 6 p.m.
N.Y. Rangers at Toronto, 6 p.m.
Ottawa at Philadelphia, 6 p.m.
Vegas at Buffalo, 6 p.m.
Boston at N.Y. Islanders, 6:30 p.m.
Columbus at Chicago, 7 p.m.
San Jose at Dallas, 7 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Calgary, 9 p.m.

Rodeo

RodeoHouston

Super Series I

(Total money won after Thursday's third round)

Bareback riding

1. Nick Pelke, $5,375; 2. Garrett Shadbolt, $3,750; 2. Tanner Aus, $3,750;

Barrel racing

1. Lisa Lockhart, $6,750; 2. Paige Jones, $4,250; 3. Jessica Routier, $4,000;

Breakaway roping

1. Tiada Gray, $4,750; 2. Danielle Lowman, $4,000; 3. Shelby Boisjoli Meged, $3,750;

Bull riding

1. Jeffrey Askey, $6,500; 2. Grayson Cole, $4,500; 3. Dustin Boquet, $3,000;

Saddle bronc riding

1. Lefty Holman, $5,250; 2. Statler Wright, $4,250; 3. Cole Elshere, $4,000.

Steer wrestling

1. Stephen Culling, $5,000; 2. Kyler Dick, $4,500; 3. Gus Franzen, $3,500.

Team roping

1. Wenceslao Aguilera/Jonathan Torres, $6,500; 2. Aaron Tsingine/Ryan Motes, 4,750; 3. Andrew Ward/Tanner Braden, $4,500;

Tie-down roping

1. Caleb Smidt, $6,500; 2. Trevor Hale, $3,750; 3. Jontavian Douch, $3,250.

Soccer

MLS

Feb. 25 results

Toronto FC 0, Cincinnati 0, tie
New York 0, Nashville 0, tie
Miami 1, LA Galaxy 1, tie

Saturday's games

Columbus at Minnesota, 1 p.m.
Los Angeles FC at Real Salt Lake, 1 p.m.
Orlando City at Miami, 3:30 p.m.
Charlotte FC at Vancouver, 6:30 p.m.
Cincinnati at Chicago, 7:30 p.m.
CF Montréal at FC Dallas, 7:30 p.m.
New York at Houston, 7:30 p.m.
Philadelphia at Sporting Kansas City, 7:30 p.m.
New York City FC at St Louis City, 7:30 p.m.
Nashville at Colorado, 8:30 p.m.
D.C. United at Portland, 9:30 p.m.
LA Galaxy at San Jose, 9:30 p.m.
Austin FC at Seattle, 9:30 p.m.

Sunday's game

Toronto FC at New England, 1 p.m.

GOLF NOTEBOOK



Brennan Asplen/Getty Images

Bud Cauley, playing in a tour event for only the third time in nearly 4 ½ years, shot 6-under 65 for the lead.

Cauley leading by 2 at Cognizant

WIRE REPORTS

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. — Bud Cauley is leading on the PGA Tour. That might not have seemed likely a few years ago.

Cauley — who was seriously injured in a 2018 car crash and is playing a tour event for only the third time in nearly 4 ½ years — shot a 6-under 65 on Friday at PGA National to take a one-shot lead after 36 holes of the Cognizant Classic.

Cauley has 11 birdies and no bogeys over his last 27 holes.

"My expectation was to come out and compete, and I felt like my game was in a good spot," Cauley said. "I'm really happy with how I've played."

Austin Eckroat (67) and Garrick Higgo (65) were a shot back. Kevin Yu (67) and Victor Perez (66) were tied for fourth at 9 under.

Boutier takes lead at Singapore

Six-time LPGA Tour winner Celine Boutier had a bogey-free round of 8-under 64 on Friday to take a one-stroke lead after the second round of the HSBC Women's World Championship.

The 30-year-old French player had a 36-hole total of 7-under 137 on the Sentosa Golf Club.

Ayaka Furue of Japan was in second after a 67. Madelene Sagstrom was in third after a 67, two strokes behind Boutier. Sarah Schmelzel, who led by one stroke after the opening round, shot 72 and was three behind and in a group of five tied for fourth.

Brooke Henderson shot 66 to move within four shots of the lead. Patty Tavatanakit was also four strokes behind Boutier.

Kim returns after 12-year absence

Anthony Kim hit his first competitive shot in 4,320 days and then hit more shots than he wanted Friday at LIV Golf Jeddah in Saudi Arabia.

He opened with a 6-over 76 and was in last place, trailing Masters champion Jon Rahm and Adrian Meronk by 14.

Kim walked away from the PGA Tour after the first round of the Wells Fargo Championship on May 3, 2012, beset by injuries and a lost game.

AROUND SPORTS

NCAA will pause NIL investigations

WIRE REPORTS

After another courtroom loss, the NCAA has told its enforcement staff to halt investigations into booster-backed collectives or other third parties making name, image and likeness compensation deals with Division I athletes.

In a letter to member schools on Friday, NCAA President **Charlie Baker** said the the Division I Board of Directors directed enforcement staff "to pause and not begin investigations involving third-party participation in NIL-related activities."

The move comes a week after a federal judge granted a preliminary injunction in a lawsuit brought by the attorneys general of Tennessee and Virginia.

The antitrust suit challenges NCAA rules against recruiting inducements, saying they inhibit athletes' ability to cash in on their celebrity and fame.

Rule changes under consideration: The NCAA is considering allowing the head coach to have in-game communication with one player on offense and one on defense in a series of rules proposals.

The NFL-like proposals need to be approved by the NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel, which is scheduled to discuss football proposals April 18.

Each school would have the option to use coach-to-player communications through the helmet to one player on the field.

NFL

Commanders cut Leno and Thomas

The roster overhaul has begun for the Washington Commanders.

They released starting left tackle **Charles Leno** and tight end **Logan Thomas**, moving on from two veterans as the new regime led by general manager **Adam Peters** puts its stamp on the organization.

TENNIS

Rublev defaults at Dubai tourney

Andrey Rublev was defaulted from his semifinal at the Dubai Championships for yelling in the face of a line judge, allowing **Alexander Bublik** to reach the final.

Also, defending champion **Daniil Medvedev** was knocked out in the other semi by **Ugo Humbert** 7-5, 6-3.

SKIING

Odermatt adds to winning streak

Marco Odermatt stretched his World Cup giant slalom winning streak to 11 races on Friday on Aspen, Colo., and added that discipline's season title to the overall title he clinched last weekend.

EPA delays setting climate rules

Existing natural gas power plants will be temporarily excluded

By James Osborne
WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration said Thursday it would delay the roll out of tough new climate standards for the power sector to temporarily exclude existing natural gas plants, following pushback from power companies and communities surrounding the plants.

The Environmental Protection Agency said it would finalize standards for coal plants and new natural gas plants in the coming months while it works toward a "stronger, more durable" approach on the nation's existing gas fleet, the country's largest source of power generation.


Regan

"The agency is taking a new, comprehensive approach to cover the entire fleet of natural gas-fired turbines, as well as cover more pollutants, including climate, toxic and criteria air pollution," EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a statement.

Regan said while this new approach would achieve "greater emissions reductions than the current proposal," EPA would also consider "flexibilities to support grid operators" and would recognize "ongoing technological innovation offers a wide range of decarbonization options."

The agency did not set a timeline on when the new standards would be ready for public review, but the delay would likely mean standards for existing gas plants would not be finalized before the presidential election in November.

The delay is a boon to Texas' oil and gas industry, for which the power sector remains the largest customer, consuming 40% of the natural gas produced in the United States, according to the Department of Energy.

American Petroleum Institute Senior Vice President Dustin Meyer praised the change to the clean power plan as a "recognition of the critical role natural gas plays in maintaining electric grid reliability."

The administration released a draft clean power plan last year that would require fossil-fuel fired power plants to install expensive carbon capture equipment or burn clean hydrogen fuel, with the aim of getting the U.S. power grid to net zero emissions by 2035.

That proposal came under criticism from power utilities worried it would threaten the reliability of the U.S. power grid, leading to more regular blackouts.

The Energy Future Initiative, a nonprofit formed by former Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz, said in a report last year that the proposal "faces major implementation challenges," considering the tens of thousands of miles of hydrogen and carbon dioxide pipelines that would need to be built and the high costs of the technology, which the group said was likely to prove far more expensive than the EPA estimated.

At the same time, the administration has come under increasing pressure from communities surrounding the nation's power plants to improve air quality standards within the clean power plan.

"Many of our communities experience the immediate impacts of living near the existing infrastructure of coal plants, gas plants, pipelines, and extraction and refining facilities," a coalition of environmental justice leaders, including Robert Bullard, a professor at Texas Southern University, wrote in a letter to the White House earlier this month, according to the Washington Post. "As a result, achieving (environmental justice) should be a central focus of

EPA continues on B11

Firefly Aerospace expands in Central Texas

By Andrea Leinfelder
STAFF WRITER

Firefly Aerospace has expanded its rocket manufacturing and testing facility in Central Texas, holding a ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday at its Briggs location north of Austin.

The 207,000-square-foot facility, up from 92,000 square feet, supports the production of two rockets: Northrop Grumman's Antares 330 and the Medium Launch Vehicle that Firefly and Northrop Grumman are developing together.

Firefly's expansion includes two new buildings for rocket production, assembly and integration and two new test stands

Firefly continues on B11


William Luther/Staff photographer
An under-construction rocket engine test stand is shown Wednesday at the Firefly Aerospace facility in Bertram.



Kirk Sides/Staff photographer
Unity National Bank continues to grow, as evidenced by profits going from $327,000 in 2020 to $5 million last year.

Black bank marks 60 years

Unity National plans to invest further in its employees and services

By Nusaiba Mizan
STAFF WRITER

Texas' only Black-owned bank looks to invest further in technology and services after growing by about $100 million in assets since 2019.

When Kwame Nkrumah Cain became Unity National Bank's general counsel in 2018, he knew the bank had to grow to survive. The 60-year-old Houston bank based in Third Ward was far from where it is today: It had $93 million in assets and lost $1.6 million that year. But Cain came aboard believing in Unity's mission to serve community businesses and low- and moderate-income households. The bank is one of about 20 Black-owned banks nationally, according to 2023 FDIC data.


Cain

Unity scaled up with investments from larger banks, and it was propelled by $56 million in small-business loans as part of a federal pandemic-era program to save jobs. Unity's profits have grown from $327,000 in 2020 to $2 million in 2021, $3.03 million in 2022, and $5 million last year. It has grown to over $200 million in assets.

"And that's created the upward trajectory. We're very profitable," said Cain, who is also executive vice president, head of strategy.

With its bottom line improving, Unity expanded training for employees, and enhanced services and technology. (Customers can now make mobile deposits, for example.) It also plans to invest more in small-business services and in efforts to attract younger customers.

"We celebrated 60 years last August," Cain said. "We want to be here another 60 years."

Unity is also borrowing best practices from larger banks, Cain said, and it is training under Citibank's mentorship to

Unity continues on B10

Dubai chai franchise opening 2 new locations in Houston

By Nusaiba Mizan
STAFF WRITER

Franchise owners of a Sugar Land chai shop plan to open two new Houston locations this year.

Filli Cafe, a Dubai-based chain, will open shops at 5600 Hillcroft in February and at 11660 Westheimer in July, co-owner Zeeshan Shaikh said. Shaikh and his four partners opened Houston's first Filli location on Highway 6 in 2022, a result of collaboration over cups of chai.

"We used to actually hang out every weekend. We used to have chai at one of our houses. And suddenly the concept came up where, why don't we bring something like this locally in Texas," co-owner Mohd Ahteshaam Hussain said.

A couple of partners, including Shaikh, who grew up in Dubai, mentioned Filli.

The first of the two new locations will open near many longtime South Asian businesses on Hillcroft. The Westheimer shop will be up the road from the "West on West" food and retail center.


Maryam Shaikh enjoys a Cookie Monster bottle shake while Muhammad sips a mango pouch drink at Filli Cafe.


Photos by Kirk Sides/Staff photographer
The double meat cheeseburger is a popular item on the menu at Filli Cafe in Sugar Land.

Hussain said they worked with the Filli brand to create a space for Houstonians of all cultures to gather. The owners said they wanted to create a place that allowed and encouraged customers, especially families, to sit for several hours. Places with both seating and chai are often restaurants that may expect you to buy food, Shaikh said.

"My customers, actually, when they come and sit, that table's gone," Shaikh said.

Hussain said he saw children bring games to play with cups of chai during the holidays, and high schoolers will do homework during the school year.

Jalil Malik and friends gather every evening at the cafe. The tradition of meeting over cups of chai is part of the culture in South Asia and the Middle East, he said.

"So this concept is from there," Malik said. "This is one place where we can just come here and not talk about bills, stuff like that."

He said he's seen an influx of chai places in the past four years and called Filli a "pioneer" among them.

Customer Hashim Malik, who was at Filli last week with his wife Ramsha Hasham, said chai places open late provide an alternative to bars or clubs for some. Filli is open until 11 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and until 1 a.m. on Friday and Saturday.

Hashim Malik recently moved back to Houston after four years living in Arizona.

"So me coming back— that's a good litmus test to see how much things have grown, how much things have changed," Malik, adding, "Coming back from Arizona, it felt like a lot more places popped up and a lot of those places were chai spots like this."

Business Editor Jonathan Diamond: Jonathan.Diamond@houstonchronicle.com

Wall Street wraps up another winning week

By Stan Choe
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Wall Street closed its latest winning week with more gains Friday, pushing U.S. stocks to new heights.

The S&P 500 rose 40.81 points, or 0.8%, to 5,137.08 a day after setting an all-time high. It's been on a tremendous run and has climbed in 16 of the last 18 weeks because of excitement about cooling inflation and a mostly resilient U.S. economy.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 90.99, or 0.2%, to 39,087.38. Technology stocks led the market, and the Nasdaq composite jumped 183.02, or 1.1%, to 16,274.94 a day after surpassing its prior record set in 2021.

In the bond market, Treasury yields eased after reports on manufacturing and sentiment among U.S. consumers came in softer than economists expected. They reinforced bets that the Federal Reserve may begin cutting interest rates in June, particularly after a report on Thursday showed a key measure of inflation behaved pretty much as expected last month.

Dell Technologies helped drive the stock market after jumping 31.6%. It reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected, highlighting demand for its AI-optimized servers.

A seemingly never-ending crescendo of demand for artificial-intelligence technology has helped catapult stocks higher over the last year. Dell has more than tripled in the last 12 months, while Nvidia has surged more than 260%.

NetApp leaped 18.2% after reporting stronger results than expected, saying it's seeing "good momentum in AI." The data company also gave a forecasted range for profit in the current quarter that topped what several analysts were expecting.

The mood was much more dour in the banking industry, where New York Community Bancorp tumbled 25.9%. It warned investors late Thursday that it found weakness in how it internally reviews loans, caused by ineffective oversight, risk assessment and monitoring activities.

The company said it won't be able to file its annual report in time, and it took a charge worth $2.4 billion against its results for the last three months of 2023. Its CEO stepped down after 27 years with the company, effective immediately.

Much attention has been on smaller regional banks after last year's crisis in the industry led to the collapses of several. One of them, Signature Bank, was swallowed up by NYCB, which has caused the resulting bank to face stricter oversight amid struggles for loans tied to real estate.

While NYCB faces many issues that are specific to it, the worry has been that banks across the industry face challenges from loans made for real-estate projects.

They're under pressure in part because the Federal Reserve has hiked its main interest rate to the highest level since 2001, which can squeeze the financial system. The hope has been that the Fed will cut interest rates several times this year to offer some relief for banks and the broader economy.

The Fed has indicated it may do so if inflation continues to cool decisively toward its 2% target. But a string of stronger reports on the economy than expected have made traders push back forecasts for when the cuts could begin. The hope now is that the Fed could start in June after traders shelved earlier expectations for March.

Hopes for a June cut built after a report showed the U.S. manufacturing industry shrank in February for a 16th straight month. Manufacturing has been one of the weakest-performing areas of the economy, while a resilient job market and spending by U.S. consumers have propped it up. The report from the Institute for Supply Management also said prices paid by manufacturers for raw materials rose again, but at a slower pace than in January.

A separate report from the University of Michigan said sentiment among U.S. consumers was weaker than economists expected. It slipped in February from January but held most of the gains seen in recent months. That's important because spending by U.S. consumers makes up the bulk of the economy.

In the bond market, Treasury yields sank following the reports. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.18% from 4.25% late Thursday and from 4.28% just before the data's release.

The two-year Treasury yield, which more closely tracks expectations for the Fed, sank to 4.53% from 4.62%.

Economists at Deutsche Bank expect the Fed to cut its main interest rate by 1 percentage point this year, down from its current range of 5.25% to 5.50%. Like many traders, they also expect the Fed to start in June.

But chief U.S. economist Matthew Luzzetti also says there are several reasons to be cautious about cuts. One is that stock prices have already rallied and Treasury yields have already sunk on expectations for coming cuts, which loosens conditions for the economy and could add upward pressure on inflation.

In stock markets abroad, Japan's Nikkei 225 jumped 1.9%. Indexes rose more modestly across the rest of Asia and Europe.

Musk sues OpenAI, Altman claiming he was betrayed

By Kelvin Chan, Thalia Beaty and Matt O'Brien
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Elon Musk is suing OpenAI and its CEO Sam Altman over what he says is a betrayal of the ChatGPT maker's founding aims of benefiting humanity rather than pursuing profits.

In a lawsuit filed at San Francisco Superior Court, billionaire Musk said that when he bankrolled OpenAI's creation, he secured an agreement with Altman and Greg Brockman, the president, to keep the AI company as a nonprofit that would develop technology for the benefit of the public.

Under its founding agreement, OpenAI would also make its code open to the public instead of walling it off for any private company's gains, the lawsuit says.

However, by embracing a close relationship with Microsoft, OpenAI and its top executives have set that pact "aflame" and are "perverting" the company's mission, Musk alleges in the lawsuit.

OpenAI declined to comment on the lawsuit Friday.

"OpenAI, Inc. has been transformed into a closed-source de facto subsidiary of the largest technology company in the world: Microsoft," the lawsuit





Elon Musk, left, is suing OpenAI and CEO Sam Altman for breach of contract and unfair business practices.

filed Thursday says. "Under its new Board, it is not just developing but is actually refining an AGI to maximize profits for Microsoft, rather than for the benefit of humanity."

AGI refers to artificial general intelligence, which are general purpose AI systems that can perform just as well as — or even better than — humans in a wide variety of tasks.

Musk is suing over breach of contract, breach of fiduciary duty and unfair business practices. He also wants an injunction to prevent anyone, including Microsoft, from benefiting from OpenAI's technology.

Those claims are unlikely to succeed in court but that might not be the point for Musk, who is getting his take and personal story on the record, said Anupam Chander, a law professor at Georgetown University.

"Partly there's an assertion of Elon's founding role in OpenAI and generative AI technology, in particularly his claim he named OpenAI and he hired the key scientist and that he was the primary funder of its early years," Chander said. "In some sense it's a lawsuit that tries to establish his own place in the history of generative AI."

Musk was an early investor in OpenAI when it was founded in 2015 and co-chaired its board alongside Altman. In the lawsuit, he said he invested "tens of millions" of dollars in the nonprofit research laboratory.

Musk resigned from the board in early 2018 in a move that OpenAI said at the time would prevent conflicts of interest as the Tesla CEO was recruiting AI talent to build self-driving technology at the electric car maker. "This will eliminate a potential future conflict for Elon," OpenAI said in a February 2018 blog post. Musk has since said he also had disagreements with the startup's direction, but he continued to donate to the nonprofit.

Later that year, OpenAI filed papers to incorporate a for-profit arm and began shifting most of its workforce to that business, but retained a nonprofit board of directors that governed the company. Microsoft made its first $1 billion investment in the company in 2019 and the next year, signed an agreement that gave the software giant exclusive rights to its AI models. That license is supposed to expire once OpenAI has achieved artificial general intelligence, the company has said.

Its unveiling of ChatGPT in late 2022 bought worldwide fame to OpenAI and helped spark a race by tech companies to capitalize on the public's fascination with the technology.

When the nonprofit board abruptly fired Altman as CEO late last year, for reasons that still haven't been fully disclosed, it was Microsoft that helped drive the push that brought Altman back as CEO and led most of the old board to resign. Musk's lawsuit alleged that those changes caused the checks and balances protecting the nonprofit mission to "collapse overnight."

One of Musk's claims is that the directors of the nonprofit have failed to uphold their obligations to follow its mission, but Dana Brakman Reiser, a professor at Brooklyn Law School, is skeptical that Musk had standing to bring that claim.

"It would be very worrisome if every person who cared about or donated to a charity could suddenly sue their directors and officers to say, 'You're not doing what I think is the right thing to run this nonprofit,'" she said. In general, only other directors or an attorney general, for example, could bring that type of suit, she said.

Even if Musk invested in the for-profit business, his complaint seems to be that the organization is making too much profit in contradiction to its mission, which includes making its technology publicly available.

"I care about nonprofits actually following the mission that they set out and not being captured for some kind for profit purpose. That is a real concern," Brakman Reiser said. "Whether Elon Musk is the person to raise that claim, I'm less sure."

Whatever the legal merits of the claims, a brewing courtroom fight between Musk and Altman could offer the public a peek into the internal debates and decision-making at OpenAI, though the company's lawyers will likely fight to keep some of those documents confidential.

"The discovery will be epic," posted venture capitalist Chamath Palihapitiya on Musk's social media platform X on Friday. To which Musk replied in his only public commentary so far on the case: "Yes."

Boeing reportedly in talks to acquire Spirit AeroSystems

By David Koenig
ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS — Boeing is in talks to buy Spirit AeroSystems, which builds fuselages for the plane-maker's 737 Max jetliners, including the one that suffered a door panel blowout in January, according to a person knowledgeable about the discussions.

The timing of a deal — or whether the two sides even reach a final agreement — is uncertain, according to the person, who spoke about the private talks on condition of anonymity.

The Wall Street Journal first reported the talks. The newspaper said Friday that Spirit hired bankers to consider strategic options and has held preliminary discussions about a sale back to Boeing, its former owner.

Boeing and Spirit declined to comment.

Shares of Spirit jumped 15% in afternoon trading.

A deal could help Boeing respond to critics who have blamed the company's manufacturing problems in large part on outsourcing key work to Spirit and other suppliers.

Boeing spun off Spirit in 2005 as part of a strategy to outsource the supply chain for its commercial planes. In recent years, quality problems have mounted at Spirit, including fuselage panels that didn't fit together precisely enough and holes that were improperly drilled. Those and other flaws held up deliveries of Boeing 737s and 787s.

Spirit removed its CEO in October and replaced him with Patrick Shanahan, a former Boeing executive who served as acting defense secretary in the Trump administration.

Scrutiny of Spirit — which is not related to Spirit Airlines — grew even stronger after an emergency door plug that it made blew off an Alaska Airlines 737 Max 9 over Oregon on Jan. 5.

Investigators said the panel had been removed at a Boeing factory to let Spirit workers fix damaged rivets and that bolts that help hold the panel in place were missing after the repair job. It is not clear who removed the bolts and failed to put them back.

Two weeks later, Boeing CEO David Calhoun toured the Spirit factory in Wichita, Kan. Calhoun and Shanahan pledged to work together to improve manufacturing quality. Shanahan said Spirit would work with Boeing, regulators and airlines, and he vowed, "We will restore confidence."

Calhoun has long defended Boeing's outsourcing, but his tone changed in recent weeks. On Jan. 31, as Boeing reported a fourth-quarter loss, Calhoun said outsourcing probably went too far.

About 70% of Spirit's revenue last year came from work done for Boeing, according to Spirit's latest annual report. That is up from 60% two years earlier. Most of the company's other revenue comes from making parts for Airbus, Boeing's European rival.



Ted S. Warren/Associated Press

Boeing spun off Spirit AeroSystems in 2005 as part of a strategy to outsource the supply chain for its commercial planes. In recent years, quality problems have mounted at Spirit.

Spirit also is looking into selling operations in Ireland that make parts for Airbus, the Journal reported.

Spirit lost $616 million last year and hasn't turned a full-year profit since 2019. Since then, it has lost more than $2.5 billion. Boeing agreed in October to give more financial help to Spirit. Boeing said it would provide $100 million for Spirit to retool its factory and adjust prices to give the supplier an additional $455 million over two years.

Boeing has its own manufacturing problems. This week, the Federal Aviation Administration gave the company 90 days to submit a plan to improve quality and to address safety concerns raised by a panel of experts who spent a year studying Boeing.

TV's ghost networks have been 'left for dead'

By David Bauder
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — The list of memorable characters and personalities who entered popular culture through cable television is long: Honey Boo Boo. Tony Soprano. Lizzie McGuire. Don Draper. Jon Stewart. Beavis and Butt-Head. Chip and Joanna Gaines. SpongeBob SquarePants.

Pick your own favorites. Chances are there won't be many more to join them.

Few cable and satellite networks are a force anymore, the byproduct of sudden changes in how people entertain themselves. Several have lost more than half their audiences in a decade. They've essentially become ghost networks, filling their schedules with reruns and barely trying to push toward anything new.

Says Doug Herzog, once an executive at Viacom who oversaw MTV, Comedy Central and other channels: "These networks, which really meant so much to the viewing public and generations that grew up with them, have kind of been left for dead."

As they fade, so are the communities they helped to create.



Jordan Strauss/Associated Press file photo

Jon Stewart and the cast and crew of "The Daily Show" celebrate their Emmy win on Sept. 20, 2015. Stewart's triumphant return to Comedy Central this winter only begs the question: Did it really have to be this way?

What has been lost?

Pockets of success remain, notably with lifestyle and news programming. And it's not like there's nothing to watch. You'll find more options on Netflix than a diner menu.

Yet something undeniably has been lost. Stewart's triumphant return to Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" this winter only begs the question: Did it really have to be this way?

Cable TV primarily took flight in the 1980s, breaking the iron grip of ABC, CBS and NBC. Essentially the first fragmentation of media, cable brought people with common interests together, says Eric Deggans, NPR television critic.

"People who were previously marginalized by the focus on mass culture suddenly got a voice and a connection with other people like them," Deggans says. "So young music fans worldwide bonded over MTV, Black people and folks who love Black culture bonded over BET, middle-aged women bonded over Lifetime and fans of home remodeling convened around HGTV and old-school TLC."

Nickelodeon and Disney became de facto baby sitters. CNN, Fox News Channel and MSNBC changed the nation's political discourse. ESPN occupied sports fans. HBO and Showtime, and later networks like FX and AMC, offered edgier fare that broadcasters shied away from.

Networks were endlessly malleable, too. Once MTV recognized there wasn't much money in music videos — people would change channels when a song they didn't like came on — the network became a relentless arbiter of cool. Generations had their own touchstones in programs like "Punk'd," "The Osbournes" and "Total Request Live."



Mary Altaffer/AP file photo

Nickelodeon, with shows like "Hannah Montana," starring Miley Cyrus, was a de facto babysitter for many.

Now MTV is a ghost. Its average prime-time audience of 256,000 people in 2023 was down from 807,000 in 2014, the Nielsen company said. One recent evening MTV aired reruns of "Ridiculousness" from 5 p.m. to 1:30 a.m.

The general interest USA Network's nightly audience tumbled 69% in the same time span, and that was before January's announcement that viewer-magnet "WWE Raw" was switching to Netflix.

Without favorites like "The Walking Dead" or "Better Call Saul," AMC's prime-time viewership sunk 73%. The Disney Channel, birthplace to young stars like Miley Cyrus, Hilary Duff and Selena Gomez, lost an astonishing 93% of its audience, from 1.96 million in 2014 to 132,000 last year.

TBS, TNT, History, Lifetime, FX, A&E, BET, E! Entertainment, SyFy, Comedy Central, VH1 and Discovery have all lost at least half of their 2014 audience.

For many, most of the schedules are big blocks of reruns: "Seinfeld" and "The Office" on Comedy Central, "The Big Bang Theory" and "Young Sheldon" on TBS. Tyler Perry movies dominate. Cheap and cheesy nonfiction fills time: "90 Day Fiance," "Prison Brides," "Married at First Sight," "Contraband: Seized at the Border."

That's not appointment TV. It's accidental. Ghosts.

With the explosion of Netflix, the giant companies that dominate the entertainment industry saw that as the future. To a large extent, they've concentrated time, energy and resources on these services, launching a competition that still hasn't shaken out — no one knows yet how many streaming services the market will support and which ones will survive.



Associated Press

"The Bear," starring Emmy winners Jeremy Allen White, left, and Ebon Moss-Bachrach, is original content from FX.

An inevitable fate?

Was the downfall of cable the inevitable result? "That's the gazillion-dollar question," Herzog says.

"The conglomerates, they definitely jumped the gun, I think, in shifting their assets away from the cable networks and left them as zombies," says Michael Schneider, television editor at Variety. "They're paying the price."

In 2015, some 87% of American homes had a cable or satellite television subscription, according to the Nielsen company. By 2023, only 47% of homes subscribed. If you include services like Hulu or YouTube TV, the percentage of homes with access to multiple channels was 62% last year, Nielsen said.

If fewer people have cable, then obviously fewer are watching. But it's a classic chicken-and-egg situation: Have the number of subscribers dropped because people feel the networks have less to offer? Or is less being offered because there are fewer viewers?

To illustrate how fast habits are changing, a survey taken in January by the digital marketing agency Adtaxi found that 73% of viewers turned to streaming before cable or broadcast when they sat down to watch TV. Only a year earlier, 42% said streaming was their default choice.

Much of what people stream are programs originally on broadcast and cable. That provided a windfall hard to resist for creators of those shows, one top executive said. The tradeoff was getting people accustomed to a different kind of viewing experience — watching what they wanted, when they wanted it, even binging.

All without the distraction of commercials, at least at first.

Remember couch potatoes? Channel surfers? Now the " Netflix and chill " generation has taken over.

That's more than trading descriptive phrases. Reclining before a big screen with a remote control, searching for something to do, is an activity fading with the times, says John Landgraf, chairman of FX Content & Productions and a big-picture thinker of the media industry. It was Landgraf who coined the phrase "peak TV" to describe an overwhelming flood of television programming.

Streaming is more proactive, he says. Tik-Tok, YouTube and gaming are supplanting television in occupying people who are simply looking to fill some time. "They figured out passivity," Landgraf says. He says he's optimistic FX's parent, Disney, will solve this puzzle.

That's no small thing when the industry is built upon advertisers who pay to reach those consumers — active or passive.

While streaming offers viewers the convenience of making their own schedules, its algorithms are designed to push people into ever-smaller circles, suggesting programming similar to what they've already watched before, Landgraf said. It further lessens the opportunities for communal viewing experiences, or stumbling upon something that broadens your outlook.

"Collectively," he says, "we've lost something."

Road to streaming

Landgraf's FX is one of the few companies keeping its brand strong while making a transition to streaming. "The Bear," which just won an Emmy for best comedy, is an FX show but available exclusively on the Hulu streaming service. "American Horror Story" is on the actual FX television network. Several shows toggle between both.

HBO is also making the transition well, while Bravo programming is a strong draw for Peacock. Nickelodeon and MTV are among the brands having a harder time; S&P Global last week put their parent company, Paramount, on a negative credit watch, citing "the deterioration of the linear television ecosystem."

There are still networks keeping the light on. Fox News Channel is cable's top-rated network; news-oriented outlets thrived during the Trump administration but have faded recently. HGTV's home remodeling holds up. The Hallmark Channel, with wholesome stories aimed at older women, averaged 929,000 viewers in prime-time last year, up 12 percent from a decade ago.

Despite the exodus of viewers, ghost networks survive because they still make money for their owners. Cable and satellite systems pay fees to carry them — passed on to consumers, of course — and advertisers buy commercials.

When that changes, all bets are off, and odds are the ghosts will move on.

UNITY

From page B8

provide financial services to the federal government in the future.

Founded in 1963 as Riverside National Bank and chartered in 1985, Unity National Bank has a branch in Missouri City and one that opened in Atlanta in 2018. Unity still has customers who opened accounts in the bank's earliest days, said Cain, adding that it connects with them regularly.

Much of its recent growth is linked to big names including Citibank, Wells Fargo, Bank of America and J.P. Morgan, which are shareholders and allow Unity to lend more money to the community.

The big banks don't have a board seat and are not majority shareholders, Cain said. The Lawal family has maintained majority ownership since 2005, with energy executive Kase Lawal as board chairman. Of its roughly 60 common shareholders, about 80% are African American, Cain said.

"For minority depository institutions and African American-owned institutions, it's about scale, getting bigger, sustainability, and surviving in the 21st century," Cain said. "The number of African American-owned banks have declined drastically, and the reason for that is scale and capital."

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Notice to Proposers

The Houston Independent School District Purchasing Services Department located at 4400 West 18th Street, Houston, TX 77092 is soliciting Request for Proposals (RFP) via the District's electronic bidding portal. Proposers may login to view specifications and submit their responses at the following link https://houstonisd.ionwave.net/Login.aspx until 11:00 a.m. (CST) Tuesday, March 26, 2024, for the following solicitation:

RFP 24-01-07 In/After School Community Outreach Program

Pre-proposal conferences via Microsoft Teams will be held in conjunction with these RFPs. Information regarding dates, times, and instructions to receive a link to join the meeting can be located within the electronic bidding portal under the "Event Details" tab specific to this solicitation.

REQUEST FOR SUBCONTRACTOR/VENDOR PROPOSALS

San Jacinto College Project #24-10 – Generation Park Expansion Building

Tellepsen Builders, L.P , serving as the CMAR for the San Jacinto College District, requests GMP proposals for the SJC Generation Park Expansion Building Foundations and Site Improvements. This package includes underground electrical, underground plumbing, and resinous flooring.

Proposals are due on March 5, 2024, at 2:00 p.m. local time. You may submit your proposal to btaker@tellepsen.com.

LATE PROPOSALS ARE NOT ACCEPTED.

Drawings and specifications are available via invitation through SmartBidNet, please contact Lauryn Cain at 281-447-8100, for information on receiving bid documents for this project.

All document review questions are due by 5:00 PM, February 27, 2024.

All proposals shall remain valid for 90 days. The owner, CM at Risk and Architect reserve the right to reject any and all bids, to waive any informalities and irregularities in the proposal process and to make awards in the best interest of the San Jacinto Community College District.

Please contact Lauryn Cain at lcain@tellepsen.com for any questions or additional information.

Engineering union, Boeing face off in dispute

By Dominic Gates
SEATTLE TIMES

In fraught negotiations over a new contract for a group of 23 technical and safety pilots, Boeing has filed an unfair labor practice complaint against its engineering union while the union raised the level of acrimony Thursday by publicly blaming a skewed company safety culture for blocking progress.

The affected group, based at Boeing Field, are flight technical and safety pilots with the flight operations group. Their contract expires Wednesday.

These are not the pilots who routinely fly production aircraft. The technical pilots develop pilot training programs and pilot manuals, and liaise with airlines on their flight operations. The safety pilots work to help develop flight deck systems for new aircraft and support certification efforts.

In a statement Thursday, Ray Goforth, executive director of Boeing's white-collar union the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace, said the dispute reflects a safety culture that devalues this pilot group.

He said the most contentious issue in the contract talks is pay and that the latest company proposal offers to pay these pilots "28.6% less than the Boeing corporate pilots who chauffeur executives around."

"With the entire world focused on the Boeing safety culture, it was truly startling to see how differently Boeing leadership values the safe operation of its products versus the comfort of executives," Goforth said.



Ellen M. Banner/Tribune News Service

The final version of the 737 Max flies past Mt. Rainier on June 18, 2021. In fraught negotiations over a new contract, Boeing has filed an unfair labor practice complaint against its engineering union.

For the company, Boeing spokesperson Doug Alder insisted that "we respect and recognize the important role our technical and safety pilots play in enhancing our safety efforts and supporting our customers."

"These pilots are already well paid (averaging over $240,000 a year), and our contract offer would ensure they continue to be well compensated," Alder said via email.

"We are disappointed that the union is not bargaining in good faith," Alder continued. "Their most recent proposal is significantly higher than the original economic offer they made when bargaining began."

He said the union asked for an immediate 28% wage increase to match the pilots of the corporate jets.

Citing bad faith bargaining over this shift in salary demands, "indicating a clear lack of good faith desire to reach agreement," Boeing has filed an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board.

Dispute grows hot

In early negotiations the union asked for pay parity with Boeing's production pilots, who fly newly built aircraft on their initial flights.

Goforth said the dispute ignited when Boeing insisted that the correct comparison was with the pilots who fly the corporate jets who ferry executives around.

He said Boeing at first refused to disclose what the corporate pilots are paid, then relented and released the data. It later asked SPEEA's negotiators to sign a retroactive nondisclosure agreement so that they couldn't disclose this information to the pilot group.

SPEEA declined, said Goforth, calling the request "weird."

In its filing with the NLRB, Boeing complained that "the Union has refused to engage in any discussions or negotiations over a nondisclosure agreement that would protect the Company's proprietary information."

When the corporate pilot pay data revealed the 28.6% gap, the union raised its demand to match that, Goforth said. SPEEA, the white-collar union, asked for an immediate pay raise to close that gap, plus another 3.5% each year of the three-year contract thereafter.

Boeing told the NLRB that this latest demand "moved the parties significantly further away from reaching a deal."

Goforth said that during negotiations Boeing called a meeting of the pilot group and told them they would be bringing in outside contract pilots for work that overlaps with that of the SPEEA-represented group.

The pilots interpreted this as a threat to their jobs, he said.

The union has complained for several years that Boeing has systematically hollowed out the SPEEA pilot group, replacing in-house Boeing pilots with contractors.

"The resulting degradation in expert advice given to Boeing's airline customers is another example of the safety-culture problem highlighted by the FAA" on Wednesday, Goforth said.

With the dispute mired in acrimony, both sides complain that opposing negotiators have several times failed to show up for scheduled bargaining sessions.

Boeing has told the union it's willing to bring in a federal mediator. SPEEA is considering that request.

Alliance to help contractors that are struggling to fill jobs

By David Sharp
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SANFORD, Maine — While Americans lament the loss of good-paying manufacturing jobs, defense contractors are struggling to fill skilled positions that still exist in Maine and are key to the nation's defense.

Defense contractors, community colleges and universities and the U.S. Navy announced an alliance Friday to accelerate workforce training to help prepare thousands of workers for jobs at shipbuilder Bath Iron Works, which builds warships; government-owned Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, which overhauls nuclear submarines; and Pratt & Whitney, which makes jet engines for the F-35 fighter.

Charles Krugh, president of Bath Iron Works, said a highly skilled workforce is critical to the shipyard's mission, and the Maine Defense Industry Alliance "creates a cohesive and sustainable approach to meeting this critical demand."

The push comes as U.S. defense contractors work to replace munitions shipped to Ukraine to help in its fight against Russian invaders and to keep pace with China's navy, which has surpassed the U.S. fleet in size. At the same time, North Korea is developing long-range missiles and Israel's war on Hamas serves as a flashpoint in the Middle East, as well.

Navy and defense officials, the governor and members of Maine's congressional delegation were on hand Friday for the launch of the alliance, which is being jumpstarted with a $5 million donation from the Navy's Submarine Industrial Base program to expand programs and build a state-of-the-art welding lab at York County Community College.

The Maine Defense Industry Alliance mirrors efforts in other parts of the country to help workers get skills needed for defense production jobs. But the problem is especially acute in Maine.

The number of high school graduates in Maine has declined from 18,000 a decade ago to today's level of about 11,500, and workers are retiring in large numbers in the state with the nation's oldest population. The pandemic didn't help, either, contributing to job vacancies as the state's unemployment has dipped to the lowest level in 50 years.

But the alliance believes there are workers out there, including some who left the workforce altogether, immigrants who've been arriving in recent years and others who are looking for a career change.

Bath Iron Works anticipates needing to hire 3,500 employees by 2026, has discovered it as a higher retention rate of workers who've gone through a training program. Pratt & Whitney anticipates hiring 1,400 workers and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard also anticipates hiring approximately 2,700 employees, both over the next five years.



Robert F. Bukaty/Associated Press file photo

The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is seen on Sept. 8, 2021, in Kittery, Maine. An alliance will help Maine defense contractors fill jobs.

All told, the defense sector currently employs more than 20,000 people at over 150 companies in Maine, the alliance.

The goal of the alliance is to build a feeder system to attract young workers, the unemployed and the under-employed for jobs in the defense industry and expand training and evolve to invest in training for new skills.

The jobs tend to pay well. An entry level tradesperson at Bath Iron Works gets $50,000, which is about $10,000 higher than the overall average wage in Maine, according to the U.S. census.

EPA

From page B8

any effort to combat pollution from the power sector."

At a Federal Energy Regulatory Commission meeting in November, Joseph Goffman, head of the EPA's Office of Air and Radiation, acknowledged the draft rules would need some revision.

"The kinds of system management challenges operators are facing now is not the same as they were five to 10 years ago. We have to become more informed and educated about that," he said.

But the power sector remains one of the largest sources of carbon dioxide flowing into the atmosphere, responsible for 25% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, according to EPA. And a delay in rolling out controls on power emissions is likely to set back U.S. efforts to reduce its carbon footprint to net zero by 2050, said Nat Keohane, president of the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions.

"It becomes very hard to see how we achieve our goals without this," he said.

FIREFLY

From page B8

for rocket engines and structures.

Separately, the company also recently built two new mission operations centers at its Cedar Park location.

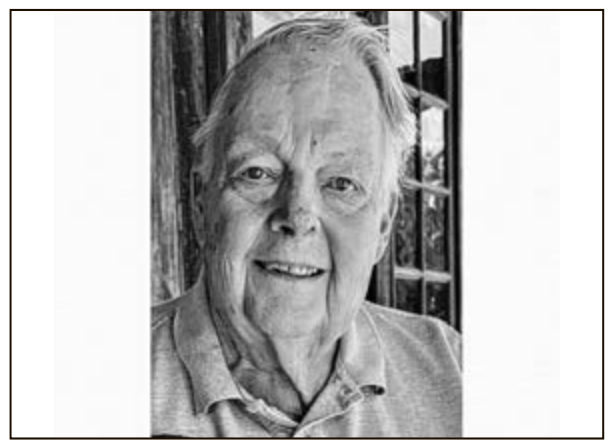
Firefly Aerospace is developing various space hardware, including small and medium-sized rockets, lunar landers and spacecraft for Earth's orbit and beyond.

South Park Cemetery
6 Spaces in Carnation Lawn, Sec 75, entrance by the cross. For details call or leave message at 713-466-8161

LIFE TRIBUTES

Peters, Mervin

MERVIN DANSBY PETERS
02/07/1942 - 02/27/2024



Mervin Dansby Peters passed away on Tuesday, 27 February, 2024. He moved from Navasota to Bryan with his family at the age of 3. Mervin graduated from Stephen F. Austin High School in 1960 and then earned his BBA in Accounting in 1964 from Baylor University, where he was a member of Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity.

Mervin married Annette Adams of Bryan in July of 1964 and that same year began a 43-year career in the banking business at City National Bank, shepherding it through a series of mergers and acquisitions over many years to what is now Wells Fargo Bank. He served as Community Banking President overseeing 23 locations in the Brazos Valley, Fairfield, Hillsboro, Sealy, Waller, and surrounding areas until his retirement in 2007.

Mervin was deeply committed to his local community. He served as Chairman of the United Way of the Brazos Valley and as president of many committees and advisory boards, including Twin Cities Endowment Inc., Brazos County Blinn College Advisory Board, Bryan/College Station Economic Development Corporation, Brazos County Industrial Foundation Board, Brazos Valley Symphony Board of Directors, Bryan/College Station Chamber of Commerce, Bryan/College Station Jaycees, Boys and Girls Club of Bryan, and the Texas Private School Foundation (Allen Academy).

Among his many honors, Mervin was recognized as Outstanding Young Man of Brazos County in 1975 and one of Five Outstanding Young Texans by the Texas Jaycees in 1976. He was named Bryan/College Station Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year and received the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Brazos Valley Man-Youth Award in 1997. He was designated Outstanding Distinguished Citizen by the African American National Heritage Society in 2002 and received the first Research Valley Partnership Leadership Award in 2006. Mervin's Run (street) and the Mervin Peters Spirit Award for Business Support were named in his honor in 2006 and 2007 by Habitat for Humanity. He was a proud member of the Sons of the Republic of Texas, who elected him a member of the Knights of the Order of San Jacinto in 2020 for outstanding service to the State of Texas. He received the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution Historic Preservation Medal in 2021 for his work in the creation of Boonville Heritage Park.

Mervin was a devoted member of First Baptist Church of Bryan and the Business Men's Bible Class. An eternal optimist, he never met a stranger, his faith never wavered, and his belief in the community knew no limits. He was a dedicated family man with a deep interest in history and enjoyed genealogical research projects in his retirement. A great lover of old-time country and gospel music he delighted in singing along regardless of having been in his words "the only person ever kicked out of a church choir." A star high school basketball player with the Broncos in his youth, Mervin was a staunch supporter of Texas A&M University and Aggie athletics of all kinds, particularly football and basketball.

His life is an example of one of his favorite principles: "You should always try to leave a place better than how you found it."

Mervin is preceded in death by his parents, Marshall Curtis Peters and Ellen Bookman Peters; brother, Marshall Bookman Peters; granddaughter, Lucile June Peters; mother-in-law and father-in-law, Lucile Yeager Adams and George Andrew (Pete) Adams, Jr.; and sister-in-law, Patricia Stehr Peters. He is survived by his beloved wife, Annette Adams Peters; daughter, Margaret Annette Peters of Santa Fe, New Mexico; son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter, George Marshall, Christina Naughton, and Celeste Alani Peters of New York City; brother-in-law, Willard Andrew Adams of Houston; sister-in-law, Florence Carter Peters of Bryan; and nieces, Karen Ellen Peters Anderson (Brian) of Arlington and their daughter, Elizabeth Ellen Anderson of Dallas; Laura Stehr Peters of Houston; Eileen Bookman Peters of Bryan; and Amy Adams Villarreal (Travis) of Dallas and their sons, Cooper James Villarreal and Grayson Cole Villarreal; and many dear cousins on both sides of the family.

The family will receive friends from 5:00 pm - 7:00 pm on Monday, March 4, 2024 at Hillier of Bryan. A celebration of Mervin's life will be held at 2:00 pm on Tuesday, March 5, 2024 at First Baptist Church of Bryan, with a reception to follow.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to First Baptist Church, 3100 Cambridge Drive, Bryan, Texas 77802 or Brazos Valley Natural History Museum, 3232 Briarcrest Drive, Bryan, Texas 77802.

Please visit www.hillier-funeralhome.com to share deepest condolences and expressions of gratitude for Mervin and a life well lived.

WEATHER

HOUSTON'S SEVEN-DAY FORECAST

AccuWeather | Go to AccuWeather.com

TODAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
79 / 62	79 / 64	78 / 65	82 / 62	80 / 63	78 / 64	74 / 58
Nice with times of clouds and sun	Cloudy with a shower in spots	Mostly cloudy with a thunderstorm	A couple of morning showers	Decreasing clouds	Cloudy with a couple of t-storms	Cloudy with a couple of showers

METRO AREA OUTLOOK

TODAY: Nice with times of clouds and sun. High 76 to 81. Winds southeast 6-12 mph.
TONIGHT: Turning cloudy and mild. Low 59 to 64. Winds south-southeast 6-12 mph.

AIR QUALITY

Today's forecast for the entire metro area by the TCEQ:

Ozone watch

- Good
- Moderate
- Unhealthy for sensitive groups
- Unhealthy
- Very unhealthy
- Hazardous

POLLEN AND MOLD

Yesterday's readings by the Houston Health Department:

	Count per cubic meter of air	
Tree pollen	Heavy	1473
Weed pollen	Low	4
Grass pollen	Medium	10
Mold spores	Low	4619

- Low
- Medium
- Heavy
- Extremely heavy

Note: No measurements on weekends; charts in Sunday and Monday papers reflect forecast ratings from the previous Friday.

COMFORT INDEX

The comfort index takes into account how the weather will feel based on a combination of factors. A rating of 10 feels very comfortable while a rating of 0 feels very uncomfortable.

Today	Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.
10	8	9	7	10	8

UV TODAY

Values indicate the exposure to the sun's Ultraviolet rays.

8 a.m.	10 a.m.	Noon	2 p.m.	4 p.m.	6 p.m.
1	2	6	4	2	0

- 0-2, Low
- 3-5, Moderate
- 6-7, High
- 8-10, Very high
- 11+, Extreme

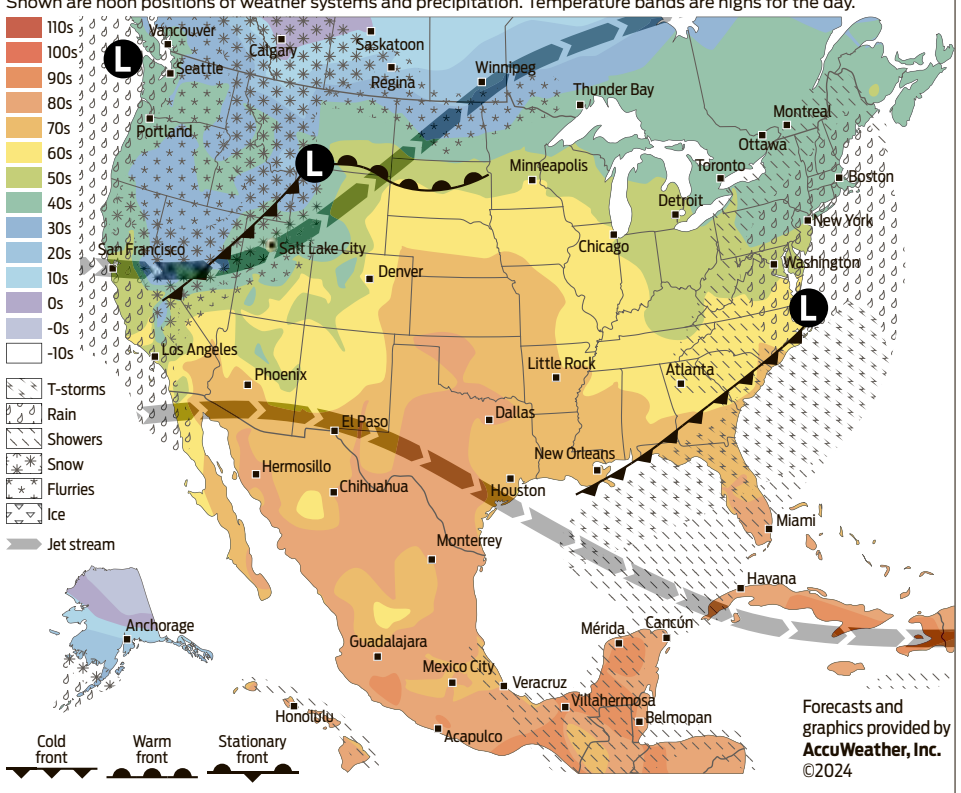
SUN AND MOON

Last quarter	New moon	First quarter	Full moon
Mar 3	Mar 10	Mar 16	Mar 25

Sunset tonight	6:21 p.m.
Sunrise Sunday	6:45 a.m.
Moonrise today	12:06 a.m.
Moonset today	10:31 a.m.

NORTH AMERICA TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.



Forecasts and graphics provided by AccuWeather, Inc. ©2024

FOR THE RECORD

George Bush Intercontinental Airport through 3 p.m. Fri.

Temperature	Degrees F
High	71
Low	49
Normal high	71
Normal low	51
Record high	84 in 2023
Record low	28 in 1980
Precipitation	**Inches**
24-hour total	Trace
Month to date	0.00
Normal month to date	0.12
Year to date	10.68
Normal year to date	6.97
Other readings	
Top wind speed	12 mph
High barometer	30.14 in.
Low barometer	30.04 in.
High dewpoint	51°
Low dewpoint	37°
Average dewpoint	43°
High humidity	71%
Low humidity	47%

KEY TO CONDITIONS

s - sunny
pc - partly cloudy
c - cloudy
sh - showers
t - thunderstorms
r - rain
sf - snow flurries
sn - snow
i - ice

TEXAS

	Today	Sun.
Abilene	83/58/s	86/59/s
Amarillo	76/47/s	79/44/pc
Austin	79/59/pc	78/65/c
Beaumont	76/60/pc	78/65/c
Brownsville	80/65/pc	83/70/pc
Bryan/College St.	79/59/pc	80/64/c
Corpus Christi	78/65/pc	81/68/c
Dallas/Ft. Worth	82/59/s	82/63/s
El Paso	75/46/s	75/47/s
Galveston	69/63/c	73/66/c
Kingsville	80/66/pc	83/67/c
Laredo	89/63/pc	84/69/pc
Longview	78/56/pc	80/61/pc
Lubbock	79/48/s	81/46/s
McAllen	84/65/pc	82/70/pc
Midland/Odessa	78/47/s	77/50/s
San Angelo	84/54/s	82/55/s
San Antonio	81/61/c	79/66/pc
Texarkana	78/56/pc	79/63/pc
Victoria	80/62/pc	80/66/c
Waco	82/58/s	80/64/pc

NATIONAL

	Today	Sun.
Albany, NY	45/38/r	60/42/c
Albuquerque	68/41/s	68/38/pc
Anchorage	19/2/s	20/13/pc
Atlanta	65/54/sh	70/59/c
Baltimore	57/41/r	65/43/c
Billings	49/24/sh	39/15/c
Birmingham	69/53/sh	74/57/c
Boise	41/25/sn	41/29/sf
Boston	48/45/r	50/44/r
Buffalo	48/40/sh	57/45/pc
Charleston, SC	72/57/sh	73/57/c
Charlotte	64/52/sh	71/53/c
Chicago	61/46/s	70/56/s
Cincinnati	56/41/pc	68/51/pc

NATIONAL cont.

	Today	Sun.
Cleveland	52/41/sh	65/49/pc
Columbus	54/41/c	64/46/pc
Denver	66/27/pc	51/24/pc
Des Moines	67/54/s	74/40/s
Detroit	54/36/pc	62/46/s
Duluth	44/34/pc	51/28/c
Fairbanks	-2/-17/s	11/-3/pc
Great Falls	27/3/sn	20/2/c
Hartford	46/42/r	59/45/sh
Honolulu	82/69/sh	83/69/sh
Indianapolis	59/41/pc	69/51/pc
Jackson, MS	76/57/c	75/60/t
Juneau	20/10/s	21/10/s
Kansas City	72/55/s	79/51/s
Las Vegas	64/48/c	62/44/pc
Little Rock	72/50/pc	78/58/s
Los Angeles	59/50/r	62/45/pc
Memphis	70/52/pc	76/61/c
Miami	82/70/c	85/70/t
Milwaukee	55/42/s	63/49/pc
Minneapolis	60/45/pc	64/33/c
Nashville	64/46/pc	75/56/pc
New Orleans	73/62/t	77/65/t
New York City	49/46/r	63/47/sh
Oklahoma City	78/53/s	79/55/s
Orlando	81/64/c	79/64/t
Philadelphia	53/44/r	64/43/c
Phoenix	77/53/s	73/51/s
Pittsburgh	54/41/r	65/43/pc
Portland, OR	45/34/sn	47/35/sh
Sacramento	52/41/sh	56/44/c
St. Louis	68/51/s	77/57/pc
Salt Lake City	53/28/r	39/25/sn
San Diego	64/54/r	63/53/pc
San Francisco	55/45/r	56/46/sh
Santa Fe	65/33/s	62/33/s
Seattle	44/32/c	45/34/sn
Tucson	76/46/s	71/45/s
Washington, DC	57/44/r	66/46/c

INTERNATIONAL

	Today	Sun.
Africa		
Cairo	76/57/pc	74/56/pc
Cape Town	80/66/s	84/65/pc
Casablanca	66/53/s	67/49/r
Dakar	77/68/s	78/68/pc
Johannesburg	83/59/pc	82/58/s
Lagos	93/80/t	94/78/t
Asia/Pacific		
Beijing	52/26/s	51/23/s
Ho Chi Minh City	98/78/pc	97/79/pc
Hong Kong	59/56/c	70/66/c
Islamabad	62/45/r	58/40/s
Jakarta	89/77/r	89/77/t
Karachi	71/52/s	73/49/pc
Kuala Lumpur	94/77/t	90/77/t
Manila	89/76/pc	91/77/s
New Delhi	74/60/sh	74/52/s
Seoul	42/27/sf	47/22/s
Shanghai	50/36/pc	58/45/s
Singapore	88/77/t	84/77/t
Sydney	81/67/t	83/67/pc
Taipei	57/55/r	72/59/pc
Tokyo	47/37/r	55/40/s
Canada		
Calgary	4/-8/sn	2/-3/c
Edmonton	6/-4/sn	5/-6/sn
Montreal	41/34/r	48/36/pc
Toronto	47/37/sh	49/39/pc
Vancouver	44/33/c	44/33/r
Winnipeg	25/23/sn	33/7/sn
Europe		
Amsterdam	54/44/sh	55/43/c
Athens	64/48/pc	64/49/pc
Berlin	54/41/c	59/40/pc
Copenhagen	46/41/r	48/39/pc
Dublin	44/32/pc	46/33/pc
Frankfurt	57/40/pc	61/40/pc
Geneva	54/40/sh	50/38/r
Istanbul	53/45/c	54/43/pc
London	47/33/sh	50/33/pc
Madrid	49/36/sh	52/39/pc
Moscow	37/20/c	37/22/c
Paris	49/40/c	50/35/c
Prague	53/40/c	57/36/pc
Rome	62/47/s	62/48/r
Stockholm	43/37/c	44/30/pc
Vienna	59/45/pc	64/44/s
Warsaw	58/41/c	58/41/pc
Zurich	57/39/pc	60/39/c
Latin America		
Bogota	71/48/r	70/50/sh
Buenos Aires	82/64/t	76/63/s
Caracas	89/74/pc	90/75/s
Havana	85/66/t	87/67/c
Kingston	87/76/s	87/75/pc
Lima	81/71/pc	82/71/pc
Rio de Janeiro	85/73/s	86/74/s
San Juan	83/74/pc	84/74/sh
San Salvador	89/68/s	87/67/s
Santiago	90/54/pc	90/53/s
Sao Paulo	80/65/pc	87/69/s
St. Thomas	84/74/s	84/74/pc
Mexico		
Acapulco	88/68/s	88/67/s
Cancun	87/73/pc	86/74/sh
Guadalajara	84/49/pc	85/48/s
Guanajuato	82/48/pc	83/47/s
Mazatlan	80/51/pc	80/52/pc
Merida	95/72/t	97/74/s
Mexico City	82/51/s	83/52/s
Puerto Vallarta	83/59/pc	83/59/s
Tampico	81/70/pc	83/71/pc
Veracruz	82/71/sh	84/71/pc
Middle East		
Baghdad	71/47/s	73/48/pc
Beirut	73/57/s	64/56/sh
Dubai	76/59/pc	78/64/s
Jerusalem	70/49/s	58/47/sh
Kabul	36/18/c	31/10/pc
Mecca	92/71/sh	93/67/pc
Riyadh	78/54/c	87/58/s
Tehran	49/35/s	52/39/pc
Tel Aviv	71/60/s	67/58/sh

COASTAL FORECAST

GALVESTON BAY: Wind from the east-southeast at 6-12 knots today. Seas 2 feet or less. Visibility generally unrestricted. **Tonight:** Wind from the south-southeast at 6-12 knots. Seas 2 feet or less. Mostly cloudy.

MATAGORDA SHIP CHANNEL TO HIGH ISLAND OUT 20 TO 50 MILES: Wind from the east-southeast at 7-14 knots today. Seas 2 feet or less. Visibility generally unrestricted. **Tonight:** Wind from the east-southeast at 7-14 knots. Seas 2 feet or less. Turning cloudy.

GALVESTON TIDES

Highs	Feet	Lows	Feet
11:53 a.m.	1.1	2:10 a.m.	-0.1
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RIVERS, CREEKS AND BAYOUS

through 7 a.m. Friday

	Location	Flood stage	Latest stage	24-hr. chg.
Brays Bayou	South Main	54	16.70	-0.03
Brazos River	Bryan	43	11.46	-0.04
	Hempstead	50	14.35	-0.18
	Richmond	48	13.18	+2.10
Buffalo Bayou	Piney Point	50	28.05	-0.03
	Shepherd Dr.	23	1.94	+1.02
Clear Creek	Friendswood	12	1.74	+1.07
Colorado R.	Austin	29	11.22	-0.19
	Bastrop	25	2.45	-0.05
	La Grange	32	3.00	-0.01
	Columbus	34	9.71	-0.08
	Wharton	39	8.86	-0.06
	Bay City	44	3.29	+0.01
Greens Bayou	Eastex Fwy.	61	39.08	+0.02
Guadalupe R.	Hunt	12	7.69	+0.01
	Comfort	26	3.27	-0.01
	Spring Branch	36	1.57	-0.01
	New Braunfels	13	9.44	none
	Gonzales	31	11.58	-0.06
	Cuero	20	7.59	-0.09
	Victoria	21	6.01	+0.10
	Dupont	20	11.58	+0.05
Little River	Little River	30	1.57	-0.09
	Cameron	30	1.37	-0.02
Navasota R.	Easterly	19	4.11	+0.12
Neches River	Evadale	19	16.48	-0.05
Pine Island B.	Sour Lake	25	12.17	-0.12
Sabine River	Bon Wier	30	23.27	-0.02
	Deweyville	24	24.38	-0.04
	Orange	4	0.73	+1.03
	Burkeville	43	23.26	+0.04
San Bernard R.	E. Bernard	17	6.59	-0.03
E. San. Jac. R.	Cleveland	19	5.20	-0.06
W. San. Jac. R.	Conroe	116	95.12	none
San Jacinto R.	Sheldon	10	1.56	+1.30
Sims Bayou	Telephone Rd.	30	1.86	+1.35
Trinity River	Goodrich	36	5.10	-0.24
	Liberty	26	8.59	-2.53
Village Creek	Kountze	20	4.08	-0.06
White Oak B.	Heights Blvd.	48	7.70	-0.05

TEXAS LAKES

through 7 a.m. Friday	Full pool	Latest level	Release cfs
Canyon Dam	909	887.60	38
Conroe	201	201.01	0
Houston	41.73	42.33	N.A.
Lake Travis	681	631.77	96
Livingston	131	131.03	

Trendy new nicotine pouches spark debate

By Matthew Perrone
ASSOCIATED PRESS



Bebeto Matthews/Associated Press

Containers of Zyn, a Phillip Morris smokeless nicotine pouch, are sold at a newsstand Friday in New York. Experts worry the variety of flavors could attract underage users.

WASHINGTON — There's nothing complicated about the latest tobacco product trending online: Zyn is a tiny pouch filled with nicotine and flavoring.

But it has stoked a debate among politicians, parents and pundits that reflects an increasingly complex landscape in which Big Tobacco companies aggressively push alternative products while experts wrestle with their potential benefits and risks.

Zyn comes in flavors like mint, coffee and citrus, and Philip Morris International markets it to adult tobacco users. But videos of young people popping the pouches have racked up millions of views on TikTok and other social media platforms.

That trend has advocates worried that Zyn could become the latest nicotine product to attract underage teens, similar to the way Juul triggered a years-long spike in vaping. Other experts say that risk is outweighed by the potential to steer adults away from cigarettes and other traditional tobacco products, which account for 480,000 U.S. deaths annually.

"The definition of insanity is doing the same thing and expecting a different result," said Dr. Jasjit Ahluwalia, an addiction specialist at Brown University. "That is what we've done with tobacco for decades. We've been all about abstinence, instead of embracing products that can reduce harm."

Ahluwalia sees nicotine pouches and e-cigarettes as a way to help smokers cut back or quit cigarettes.

That approach is standard practice in the U.K., but it's outside the medical mainstream in the U.S., where only pharmaceutical-grade medications like nicotine gum and lozenges are formally approved to help smokers quit.

Ahluwalia points out that Zyn works the same way as those products: releasing low levels of nicotine that are absorbed into the gums, reducing cravings. The chief difference, he notes, is that Zyn is sold by Philip Morris, the global cigarette giant and a longtime foe of anti-smoking groups.

The controversy around Zyn recently spilled over into politics, pitting Democrats and Republicans in Washington against each other and spiraling into another skirmish in the nation's culture war.

In late January, Democratic Sen. Charles Schumer, of New York, called on regulators to investigate Zyn, citing its appeal to teens. Several House Republicans then warned constituents that "Big Brother" intended to "ban nicotine."

Conservative pundit Tucker Carlson, a Zyn user, jumped into the fray, declaring: "Zyn is not a sin," and touting its unproven benefits, like "enhancing male vitality and mental acuity."

Zyn users have quickly developed their own online vocabulary, including "zynnies," "zyner" and "zynsky."

"There's this online subculture around Zyn that's been spearheaded by younger males, but a lot of that's not coming from the brand itself," said Ollie Ganz, a Rutgers University tobacco and nicotine researcher.

Online videos show young people documenting their first experiences trying Zyn, reviewing different flavor combinations and displaying heaping piles of used canisters.

"It's concerning to see the countless Zyn-related memes and hashtags that are being amplified and normalized across social media," said Kathy Crosby, CEO of the Truth Initiative, an anti-tobacco advocacy group.

Truth and other groups point to research suggesting nicotine can interfere with brain development in adolescents.

It's the Food and Drug Administration's job to weigh Zyn's risks to youngsters against its potential to help adults.

In a statement, an FDA spokesman said the agency is monitoring underage use, noting that 1.5% of high school and middle schoolers reported using pouches last year. That's well below the 10% who used e-cigarettes.

FDA officials have allowed Zyn to stay on the market while they review Philip Morris' marketing application, which has been pending since 2020. If teen use remains low, the company could win FDA authorization for at least some of its offerings, which come in multiple strengths and flavors.

In 2019, the FDA awarded its first-ever reduced risk designation to a similar product: snus, a tobacco pouch popular in Sweden that contains lower levels of carcinogens than cigarettes. The FDA said smokers who switch to snus reduce their risk of lung cancer, bronchitis and other diseases.

Zyn excludes the tobacco leaves found in snus, leaving only nicotine, which Philip Morris says increases its appeal.

"People can be reluctant to move into an oral tobacco product if they view it as similar to traditional chewing tobacco," company spokesman Corey Henry said. "Consumer acceptability is a big part of Zyn."

Philip Morris doesn't use online influencers or endorsements to promote Zyn, Henry said. Its website is restricted to adults 21 and older. And flavors like cinnamon and peppermint are "familiar to adults," Henry said.

Zyn launched in the U.S. in 2014, but sales have exploded in the past year, generating $1.8 billion as shipments accelerated year-over-year by over 60%.

On a November call with retailers, one company executive called the growth "gonzo" and "lights out."

"I didn't see this coming. I don't know anyone who did," said Joseph Teller, a director for oral tobacco products.

Zyn promotions emphasize the pouches' discreet, convenient nature as a "smoke-free," "spit-free" alternative for smokers "at work" or "on the move."

But to fulfill the company's stated goal of a "smoke-free future," Zyn will need to help users fully switch from cigarettes, rather than alternating between the two.

There's little data on switching, and preliminary research suggests pouches may not be a great substitute.

Ohio State University researchers recently found it took smokers 30 minutes to an hour to get enough nicotine from Zyn to relieve their cravings. With cigarettes, smokers achieved the same nicotine levels — and relief — in five minutes.

"The pouches we studied, especially the lower nicotine concentrations, did not appear to meet the needs of smokers," said Brittney Keller-Hamilton, who led the study. "That being said, they didn't totally flop either."

For now, smokers who have had success with Zyn say they hope it stays available.

Justin Wafer, 39, was smoking a pack a day last spring while working as a bartender in Portland, Oregon. On busy days, he would also vape if he didn't have time to step away for a smoke break.

But after his reloadable electronic cigarette broke in May, he decided to try Zyn. These days, he usually pops a pouch every three to four hours and says he hasn't smoked in more than nine months.

"I don't see how it's any different from pharmaceutical solutions like lozenges or gum," he says. "Except it's easier to get and tastes better."

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