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INSIDE THIS EDITION:



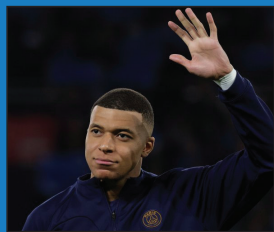
Ex-Trump official Meadows loses bid to have Ga. election case moved to federal court
Page 3



Mitch McConnell to step down as Republican Senate leader this fall
Page 6



Dolphins 'very encouraged' by contract talks with QB Tua Tagovailoa
Page 9



Soccer: Striker Kylian Mbappe to leave PSG after season
Page 10

"And so let's find out tomorrow if any Republicans show up to block the unanimous consent."

TAMMY DUCKWORTH, Illinois D. III Senator

Illinois Sen. Duckworth to introduce bill to protect IVF treatments nationwide

By Chris Benson
UPI

A senator who has used in vitro fertilization for two of her own children said Tuesday she is bringing a bill to the Senate floor to federally protect the IVF process amid a recent Alabama Supreme Court ruling that threatens the procedure.

On Wednesday, Illinois Democrat Tammy Duckworth will call for a unanimous consent Senate vote -- which a single sitting senator out of 100 could thwart -- as congressional leaders make efforts to demonstrate their support for IVF procedures.

Duckworth's bill would protect, she said, "every American's right to become a parent via treatments like IVF."

"Don't just listen to my Republican colleagues," she said Tuesday afternoon during a press event regarding her bill. "Listen to the people that they support."

Joining Duckworth as a co-sponsor, Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., said, "You cannot support IVF

See IVF, page 3



Biden to sign order aimed at protecting Americans' private data from foreign nations

By Clyde Hughes
UPI

President Joe Biden will issue an executive order Wednesday aiming to protect the most sensitive information of Americans online from foreign "countries of concern."

Biden will authorize Attorney General Merrick Garland and the

U.S. Department of Justice to stop the large-scale transfer of personal data of Americans to other countries that have "a track record of collecting and misusing data on Americans" and place safeguards on other activities that can endanger such information.

Protected information will include genomic data, personal health data, geolocation data, fi-

nanacial data and certain personal identification data. Authorities said such information has been of high value for data brokers and cyber criminals, which enables them to blackmail individuals, surveil others, and create scams, among other privacy concerns.

"Companies are collecting more

See ORDER, page 5



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OPINION

Biden's Nonsensical Immigration Bill

Anthropologist: CPAC displays how Trump's base believes he is a savior

By Alexander Hinton
Rutgers University-Newark

What is happening in the hearts of former President Donald Trump's supporters?

As an anthropologist who studies peace and conflict, I went to the annual meeting of the Conservative Political Action Conference, or CPAC, to find out. I wanted to better understand the Make America Great Again faithful -- and their die-hard support for Trump.

The event began on Feb. 21, in National Harbor, Maryland, with Steve Bannon's routine, untrue banter about how President Joe Biden stole the 2020 election, and it peaked with an angry speech from Trump three days later. In between, I sat among the MAGA masses listening to speaker after speaker express outrage about American decline -- and their hope for Trump's reelection.

Everywhere I turned, people wore MAGA regalia -- hats, pins, logos and patches, many with Trump's likeness. I spent breaks in the exhibition hall, which featured a Jan. 6 insurrection-themed pinball machine featuring "Stop the Steal," "Political Prisoners" and "Babitt Murder" rally modes and a bus emblazoned with Trump's face. Admirers scribbled messages on the bus such as, "We have your back" and "You are anointed and appointed by God to be the President."

Those on the left who dismiss the CPAC as a gathering of MAGA crazies and racists who support a wannabe dictator do not understand that, from this far-right perspective, there are compelling and even urgent reasons to support Trump. Indeed, they believe, as conservative politician Tulsi Gabbard stated in her CPAC speech on Feb. 22, that the left's claims about Trump's authoritarianism are "laughable." This is because CPAC attendees falsely perceive President Joe Biden as the one who is attacking democracy.

Here are my top three takeaways from CPAC about Trump supporters' current priorities and thinking.

1. There's a Reagan dinner - but CPAC is Trump's party

Former President Ronald Reagan runs in CPAC's DNA. Reagan spoke at the inaugural CPAC in 1974 and went on to speak there a dozen more times.

In 2019, the conservative advocacy group the American Political Union, which hosts CPAC, published a book of Reagan's speeches with commentary by conservative luminaries. In the preface, Matt Schlapp, the head of the American Political Union, says he often asks himself, "What would Reagan do?"

CPAC's pomp gala, held Friday, is still called the "Ronald Reagan Dinner." But Reagan is otherwise hardly mentioned at the conference.

Reagan's ideas of American exceptionalism have been supplanted by Trump's populist story of apocalyptic decline. Reagan's folksy tone, relative moderation and clear quips are long gone, replaced by fury, grievance and mean-spirited barbs.

2. There's a method to the madness

Many commentators and critics, including groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center, view CPAC as a frightening or bizarre gathering of white nationalists who have a nativist agenda.

In 2021, commentators said the CPAC stage was shaped like a famous Nazi design called the Othala Rune, which is a hate symbol. Schlapp denied this claim and said that CPAC supports the Jewish community, but various commentators took note of the uncanny resemblance.

A masterpiece of duplicity is President Joe Biden. You would assume that after decades in the Senate, he would have gained some knowledge of how to legislate. But no. Instead of making any attempt to actually solve the border crisis, he puts up a weak, glorified illegal invasion management bill -- not to stop illegals, just to manage them better and faster.

First, the timing couldn't be more perfect. It's an obvious play to try and attempt to appease Republicans and independents to capture more votes. But he couldn't even do that right. Instead, he attached other priorities to it, rendering it a quadruple failure.

It's a simple analysis. It should have been obvious to him not to tie his other priorities to a meaningless border bill. Republicans obviously were going to have an issue with it. And they did. Going forward, he will be in turmoil as he attempts to secure even more funding for a foreign war in which the U.S. has no obvious strategic stake in.

It is common knowledge that the border has nothing to do with laws but everything to do with the whims of the current executive. In today's radical politics, the

border is either open or it is closed. Migrants are either coming into the United States in droves or they're being stopped whenever possible. By implementing executive orders, for example, former President Donald Trump halted the influx of migrants, maintaining



ARMSTRONG WILLIAMS

total migrant encounters of 1.3 million over a 24-month period. Biden, however, repealed and reintroduced provisions that transformed the border and Border Patrol into a processing station for illegals rather than a barrier or point of entry. This not only increased encounters but practically encouraged them, increasing that amount to 5 million over a similar period.

That is not what any rational elite would desire. A rational elite does not want their country to be overrun by people who inevitably will become public charges -- people who will ultimately depend upon the government for assistance at every turn, whether it be for food, shelter or other necessities.

Fixing the issue does not require new legislation; all that is required is his determination to safeguard the nation. But perhaps getting more democratic voters is more important to him and his party. Yes, he's the president of the United States -- the most important country in the world -- yet he's an apparent willful idiot. Additionally, he lacks the ability to defend himself rhetorically, even going so far as stumbling over his words and ideas ironically even when defending his cognitive abilities.

The other thing, objectively, is that this is as good as it gets for him. Ukraine isn't turning around. We will not reach 2% inflation in the near future. Youth and the left wing of his party refer to him as "Genocide Joe" in reference to Gaza as a result of his party's inability to control their fringe left-wing sect. Additionally, the number of targets in the region is insufficient to appease the Houthis in Yemen or the Iran proxies in Iraq and Syria with a few explosives. They can only be appeased through troops on the ground -- something that he will absolutely not do during an election year, lest he be accused of genocide

by his party once more. As a result, those locations will continue to deteriorate.

The border will not recover from its present state of disarray in the absence of critical actions that he continues to decline to undertake. It's possible that he will argue that all he wants is for Republicans to reject this major bill because it was the "fix," but the fact that the law was passed so quickly makes his case, at best, tenuous.

Biden is a trip down a staircase from being totally, obviously unviable as a candidate. It is truly baffling that the Democrats remain unchanged in the face of impending catastrophe -- well, something other than attempting to remove Trump from the ballot, since presenting political arguments against him appears to be of little interest to them.

Unfortunately for Democrats, Biden's presidency is marked by a series of miscalculations and missteps, particularly regarding his handling of the border crisis and his legislative strategy. He has not only failed at every turn, but he has increasingly made America a more dangerous and divided place than ever before.

Pitting the border against aid for Ukraine is a fool's choice

By Harlan Ullman
UPI

America's government and politics have long lost the ability for rational debate.

The current crisis over how to "fix" the border and provide vital aid to Ukraine could not be more relevant. House Republicans, led by Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., who many believe has become Donald Trump's puppet, argue that the border crisis must be addressed as the first priority before dealing with Ukraine.

The oath of office for Congress shows why this political standoff is based on a fool's choice. Specifically members "solemnly swear (or affirm) ...to... support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic..." While no priorities are set between foreign and domestic, it was no accident which came first.

The border will not be "fixed" in the short term, no matter the legislation. The last major immigration reform was made in 1986. And dealing with the many millions of migrants in the United States, legally or not, and so-called "sanctuary cities," where crowding due to migrants has reached crisis proportion, must take time.

About Ukraine, the return to isolationism, reminiscent of the 1930s, has broken out within the Trump-dominated Republican Party. The quaint and misguided thinking is that Europe should be able to defend itself against Vladimir Putin's Russia. Despite the European Union and NATO, there is no "Europe." The presence of the



United States has indeed given "Europe" a leader about which to band.

In the 1930s, the world could not have been more different from today. The United States, like most European states, was powerfully affected by World War I. But the United States had not suffered the destruction and deaths that made foreign states unwilling to engage in another war. The United States had turned inward. That FDR's Lend Lease and renewal of the draft bills passed by single votes in Congress reinforced the strength of the nation's isolationist mood.

It took Pearl Harbor to shock the nation back to a state of reality. Whether or not the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a 21st century version of Pearl Harbor, it has motivated NATO and the EU to act in response to Russia's attack. Now, NATO members are openly discussing the likelihood of a Russian attack against the alliance, with some suggesting a compressed timetable of several years for that to occur.

Trump has added political nitroglycerin to those concerns with his off-the-cuff comment that Putin "can do whatever the hell they want" after threaten-

ing that the United States would not defend NATO if members do not spend more on defense. From a Ukrainian perspective, a Trump presidency would likely end all aid, although if or when the current package goes through Congress, it may well be the last.

Why can't Johnson understand that the border crisis and Ukraine spending are not either-or issues? Then suppose the aid package dies. The consequences for Ukraine would be disastrous. While Europe is trying to fill the gaps, particularly in artillery and air defense munitions, it lacks the capacity of the United States.

Ukraine would have two impossible choices: continue the war or negotiate. Its ability to wage war would shift to defense against a determined Russian enemy. Ukraine could be forced to increase strikes inside Russia as its only offensive option. That could lead to Russian escalation and the threat of using nuclear weapons.

Ukraine would be forced to lower the draft age to 20 or even 18 to use the increase of manpower to compensate for the lack of firepower. This would produce even far great-

er Ukrainian casualties. And if the fronts collapsed, Ukraine could wage a guerrilla war. Each of these possibilities is grim.

Putin and Russia would be empowered. While rebuilding a depleted army will probably take much longer to accomplish, NATO and EU members would not rely on that alone for determining policy. Whether this would force an accommodation with Moscow is not impossible. But NATO would be weakened as U.S. reliability would be questioned.

John F. Kennedy's cynical comment that the only fate worse than being an enemy of the United States was being a friend. That would ring true in Europe. And no matter how much President Joe Biden embraces NATO, money, not promises, counts more.

Perhaps common sense will prevail this week. But because the border presents for Republicans perhaps the single issue to decide the presidential elections in November, no incentive exists for compromise. The pursuit of power will trump all else. And the consequence will be that domestic enemies have become far more dangerous than foreign ones.

Harlan Ullman is UPI's Arnaud de Borchgrave Distinguished Columnist, a senior adviser at Washington's Atlantic Council, the prime author of "shock and awe" and author of "The Fifth Horseman and the New MAD: How Massive Attacks of Disruption Became the Looming Existential Danger to a Divided Nation and the World at Large." Follow him @harlankullman. The views and opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the author.



Daily Drum Media Group
PO Box 965
Greenville, NC 27835
www.dailydrummedia.com
tdd@dailydrummediagroup.com

Roger Johnson.....Publisher
Ben Johnson.....CFO
Alishia Albrooks.....Sales Consultant
George Ayino.....Sales Consultant
Ben Ayino.....Sales Consultant
Data Group.....Web Host
Jasmine Smith.....Accounting Consultant
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Ex-Trump official Meadows loses bid to have Ga. election case moved to federal court



By Mike Heuer
UPI

Former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows on Wednesday lost his bid to have a full 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals hearing to determine if he should stand trial on election interference charges in Georgia in federal court instead of state court.

The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals denied Meadows' request for a hearing before the entire appellate court to consider moving the criminal charges filed against him in Georgia's Fulton County District Court to federal court, The Hill and ABC News reported.

The federal appellate court denied the request by issuing a short statement, saying, "The petition for rehearing en banc is denied, no judge in regular active service on the court having requested that the court be polled on rehearing en banc."

The en banc hearing denial upholds a recent ruling denying Meadows'

request to remove the matter from Georgia's state court system to federal court based on the federal officer removal statute. The statute says federal courts are the proper venue for trying federal officials for matters related to their official duties.

Chief Judge William Pryor Jr. on Dec. 18 ruled Meadows was not acting in his official capacity when challenging the 2020 election results in Georgia and is a former federal officer, so the federal officer removal statute doesn't apply in his case. Circuit judges Robin Rosenbaum and Nancy Abudu concurred.

Meadows was White House chief of staff from March 31, 2020, through Jan. 20, 2021, and argued his status as a federal official requires a federal trial instead of the state-level trial filed against him, former President Donald Trump and others in Georgia.

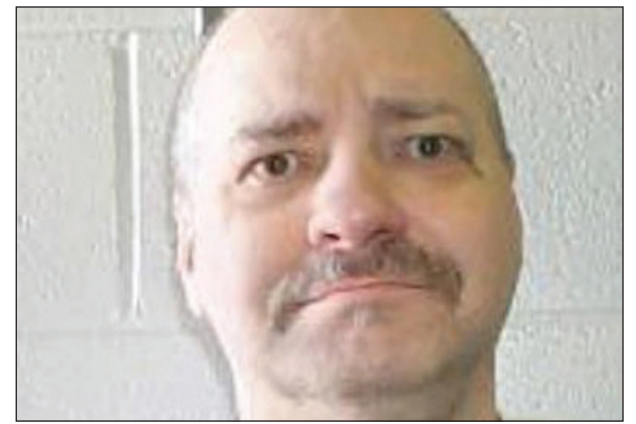
The three-judge panel in the federal appellate court disagreed, saying the Hatch Act prevents federal officials

from acting in a political capacity. Meadows' actions on behalf of President Trump in the Georgia election were political in nature and not directly related to his official duties as the White House chief of staff, so the federal removal statute doesn't apply, the appellate panel ruled.

The panel affirmed the lower court's ruling against removing the criminal prosecution to federal court and remanded the matter to Georgia's Fulton County District Court.

Removing the matter to federal court would require seating a federal jury and conducting the trial in the future after removing it from Fulton County District Court.

Denying the removal request means Meadows, Trump, and 17 co-defendants must continue defending themselves against racketeering charges in the state court or file an appeal to the Supreme Court to obtain a final verdict on the proper legal venue for the case against them.



Idaho serial killer execution botched; executioners couldn't start an IV

By Doug Cunningham
UPI

Idaho Wednesday stopped the execution of serial killer Thomas Eugene Creech when executioners failed to establish an IV line for the lethal injection.

Creech was returned to his cell.

An Idaho Department of Corrections statement said, "At approximately 11 a.m., Director Tewalt, after consulting with the medical team leader, determined that the medical team could not establish an IV line, rendering the execution unable to proceed."

The statement added, "The State will consider next steps."

Before the botched execution, Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan Wednesday denied a request to stay the execution.

The Supreme Court denial said, "The application

for a stay of execution of sentence of death presented to Justice Kagan and by her referred to the court is denied. The edition for a writ of certiorari is denied."

Deborah A. Czuba, a Creech attorney with the Federal Defenders Services of Idaho, said in a statement, "We are angered but not surprised that the state of Idaho botched the execution of Thomas Creech today. This is what happens when unknown individuals with unknown training are assigned to carry out an execution."

According to a 1993 U.S. Supreme Court opinion Creech admitted to killing or participating in the killing of at least 26 people.

In 1982 Creech told Idaho Judge Robert Newhouse he wanted to be put to death by lethal injection after pleading guilty to the murder of a fellow Idaho State Penitentiary inmate David Dale Jensen.

IVF

continued from page 1

and support fetal personhood laws. They are fundamentally incompatible."

Murray added, "You are not fooling anyone."

Duckworth -- a war veteran whose two daughters were born through IVF -- said Thursday on social media that Republicans are "working to rip away the right to grow a family from others."

This comes as Alabama lawmakers have sought in recent days to create legislation that protects IVF treatments after a recent 7-2 state Supreme Court ruling that said that frozen fertilized embryos qualify as children under Alabama law.

Duckworth noted on Tuesday how former President Donald Trump -- the

presumed frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination -- "suddenly supports IVF after crowing and claiming and taking credit for the fall of Roe v. Wade."

On Tuesday, it was unclear if any senator intends to block the unanimous consent vote.

Duckworth said she was confident in her assumption that the Alabama high-court ruling means, "If we don't act now, it will only get worse."

However, Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., stated that while there is "uncertainty among practitioners," he told reporters he believes "no threat to IVF" currently exists that would require any action by Congress.

Come Wednesday, Duckworth said, "Let's find out tomorrow if any Republicans show up to block the unanimous consent."



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Bishop Charles T. Dudley, Senior Pastor of New Beginnings Ministry of Faith in Havelock, has declared to file for NC Senate

"I believe it is time to have a senator from Beaufort, Craven and Lenoir counties who will put our children first, put our teachers first, and put all our people first," Dudley said. I have lived my life in service to others, from the time I was a Marine recruit at Parris Island, South Carolina, through to the present, when I serve on several

community boards and help the residents of eastern North Carolina as a pastor."

Born in Louisville, Ky., and raised by a single mother (his father was killed by gun violence when Charles Dudley was about a year old), Dudley has lived in eastern North Carolina for more than 25 years, counting his time as a US Marine. "I choose to live here," he

points out, adding, "I met my wife in New Bern, and we have stayed in the area to be near her family." Dudley serves on the Craven Community College Foundation Board, is Tax Commissioner for Harlowe Fire Department, is a member of the Coastal Community Action Board of Directors, overseeing HeadStart and other programs, and is on the board of directors for Habitat for Humanity. He also serves on the Craven County Sheriff's Advisory Committee.

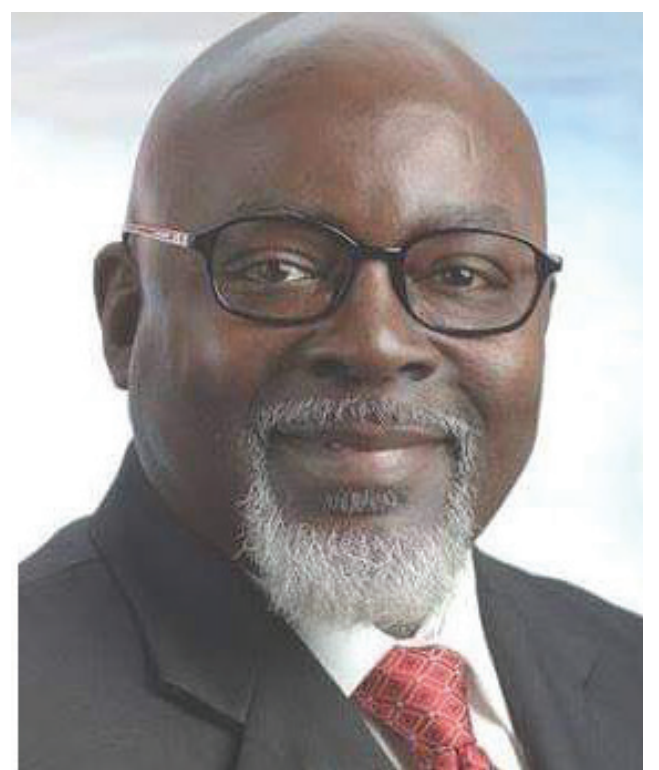
From 2018 to 2023, he served as first vice chair of Craven County Democratic Party, leading fundraising efforts for the group. He is responsible for back-to-back successful William Wainwright Dinners in 2022 and 2023, raising nearly \$25,000 for the party's efforts in memory of the late NC Rep. William Wainwright.

He also has advocated

for voting rights. "In 2022 it was 'go vote' and in 2024 it is 'no vote' for many individuals who have served their felony sentences," Dudley said. Every vote should count and that once a right is granted to an individual, it should not be taken away without some action of that individual's part. As a senator, Dudley hopes to have an opportunity to fix North Carolina's current gerrymandered maps.

As a former drill instructor at Parris Island, where he was taught marksmanship, Dudley believes in the responsibility of gun ownership and use. In addition to seeking to restore funding to the public schools and increasing North Carolina teacher pay, he would like to ensure that children feel safe going into the classrooms.

Dudley also believes in providing good health care to North Carolinians, from adequate coverage through expanding Medicaid, to



ensuring women's reproductive health coverage and adequate resources for mental health.

"My faith has taught me that loving others is paramount," Dudley said. "As the

late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King said, 'hate is too great a burden to bear.'"

With his wife Marion, Charles is a father and grandfather, as well as a brother.

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Risk of heart attack, stroke rises with more frequent use of marijuana

By Dennis Thompson
HealthDay News

Folks who use marijuana have a greater risk of heart attack and stroke, with the odds rising even higher when they partake every day, a new study finds.

Both daily and non-daily marijuana users had an increased risk of heart attack and stroke compared to non-users, researchers reported Wednesday in the Journal of the American Heart Association.

Further, the risk grew with more frequent use. Daily weed users had 25% higher odds of heart attack and 42% higher odds of stroke compared to non-users, results show.

Smoking weed in particular could pose harmful health effects compared to eating or vaping it, researchers said.

"Smoking cannabis -- the predominant method of use -- may pose additional risks

because particulate matter is inhaled," said lead researcher Abra Jeffers, a data analyst at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

For the study, researchers reviewed federal survey data collected on more than 430,000 adults between 2016 and 2020.

Nearly 90% of adults didn't use weed at all, 7% used it less than daily and 4% reported daily use. About 74% of weed users reported smoking as the most common form of cannabis consumption.

Researchers specifically looked at potential associations between cannabis use and heart disease, heart attack and stroke among the general adult population -- including those who did and didn't smoke tobacco.

"Our sample was large enough that we could investigate the association of cannabis use with cardiovascular outcomes among adults who had never used tobacco cigarettes or e-cigarettes," Jeffers noted in a journal news release.

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continued from page 1

of Americans' data than ever before, and it is often legally sold and resold through data brokers," the White House said.

"Commercial data brokers and other companies can sell this data to countries of concern, or entities controlled by those countries, and it can land in the hands of foreign intelligence services, militaries or controlled by foreign governments."

Biden is expected to ask the Justice Department to issue regulations to establish clear protections for sensitive information, establish greater protection of government-related data, set up high-security standards to discourage bad actors.

The Justice Department and Department of Homeland Security will also work to set standards aimed at preventing countries of concern from accessing Americans' data through commercial means including relationships with employees, vendors and investments.

Additionally, the Department of Health And Human Services, the Defense Department and the Department of Veterans affairs will be instructed to make sure that federal grants, contracts and awards are not used in ways that will expose Americans' sensitive health data to countries of concern, including companies that are located within the United States.

The Committee for the Assessment of Foreign Participation in the United States Telecom Services Sector will also weigh threats to U.S. personal data as it reviews licenses for submarine cables.

Lastly, the administration said it will order the agencies to ensure that these protections don't blockade necessary information for financial services or sever consumer, economic, scientific and trade ties between the United States and other nations.

"These actions not only align with the U.S.' longstanding support for the trusted free flow of data but also are consistent U.S.' commitment to an open Internet with strong and effective protections for individuals' privacy and measures to preserve governments' abilities to enforce laws and advance policies in the public interest," the White House said.

Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Returns To His Roots



Shown in Photo- Brigadier General James Gorham, Judge Lora Cubbage, and Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis.

In a spirit of reverence and admiration, esteemed leaders and community members gathered for an afternoon of celebration following a banquet dedicated to recognizing the remarkable achievements of Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Brigadier General James Gorham, and Mrs. Arcina Dixon. The event, held at the Greenville Country Club, served as a poignant reminder of the indelible contributions made by these trailblazers across various spheres of society.

Amidst an atmosphere charged by Dr. Frankie Jones, attendees reflected on the enduring legacies of individuals who have paved the way for progress and equality. From civil rights champions to cultural icons, each honoree was saluted for their unwavering commitment to social

justice, empowerment, and excellence. The banquet, characterized by eloquent speeches and heartfelt tributes, set the stage for an afternoon filled with moving conversations and shared insights. As guests mingled and exchanged stories, the impact of these influential figures resonated deeply, inspiring a renewed sense of purpose and determination.

Throughout the afternoon, as the evening drew to a close there was a palpable sense of gratitude and optimism in the air. While acknowledging the progress made, there was also a recognition of the work that lies ahead. Armed with new inspiration and a sense of unity, attendees departed with a shared commitment to honor the legacies of past leaders while forging a path toward a more equitable future.

To that end, the Black history honored at this event inspires! The Daily Drum Media Group announced scholarships for six high school students. These youth will study, beginning in Fall 2024, at Fayetteville State University, North Carolina Central University, Campbell University, University of Virginia, and East Carolina University.

The afternoon served as a reminder of the power of collective action and the enduring legacy of those who have dared to dream and strive for a better world. As the sun set on the gathering, it left in its wake a profound sense of gratitude and determination, echoing the sentiment that the journey towards justice is ongoing, but with unity and perseverance, progress is not only possible but inevitable.



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Mitch McConnell to step down as Republican Senate leader this fall

By Doug Cunningham
UPI

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., announced Wednesday he's stepping down as Republican leader in November.

"One of life's most underappreciated talents is to know when it's time to move on to life's next chapter," McConnell said from the Senate floor. "This will be my last term as Republican leader of the Senate."

McConnell, 82, added that he still has "enough gas in my tank to thoroughly disappoint my critics, and I intend to do so with all the enthusiasm with which they have become accustomed."

McConnell has served as Senate Republican leader since 2007.

He said his family is mourning the loss of Angela Chou, his wife's sister.

"We tragically lost Elaine's youngest sister, Angela, a few weeks ago. When you lose a loved one, particularly at a young age, there is a certain introspection that accompanies the grieving process," McConnell said. "Perhaps it is God's way of reminding



you of your own life's journey to reprioritize the impact on the world that we will all inevitably leave behind."

McConnell is Kentucky's longest-serving U.S. senator. He cited his age as a factor in the decision to step down from his leadership role. McConnell became the longest-serving Senate party leader in 2023.

Even though he led the effort to acquit former President Donald Trump in both impeachments, McConnell broke with the former president after the pro-Trump mob's violent insurrection at the

U.S. Capitol Jan. 6, 2021.

Despite his belief that Trump was morally responsible for the insurrection, McConnell still refused to vote to convict him, which would have barred Trump from ever again becoming president.

McConnell used his leadership position in the U.S. Senate in 2016 to block then-President Barack Obama's nomination of Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court.

McConnell refused to hold a nomination hearing for Garland, who remained Obama's nominee for 293 days. He moved quickly

on nomination hearings for conservative justices nominated by Trump.

After his speech Wednesday, McConnell got a standing ovation from senators.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., shook McConnell's hand after the speech, as did other senators of both political parties.

McConnell downplayed obvious health issues he was having in October 2023, including freezing up and being unable to speak while addressing reporters on Capitol Hill. Afterward, he said he had recovered and was getting back to work as normal.

Earlier in March he suffered a concussion after a fall at a hotel in Washington, D.C.

In his floor speech on Wednesday, McConnell said he will remain in his current post until Republicans select a new leader, who will take on the role in 2025.

"Father time remains undefeated. I'm no longer the young man sitting in the back hoping colleagues would remember my name," McConnell said. "It's time for the next generation of leadership."

Even though he led the effort to acquit former President Donald Trump in both impeachments, McConnell broke with the former president after the pro-Trump mob's violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol Jan. 6, 2021. Despite his belief that Trump was morally responsible for the insurrection, McConnell still refused to vote to convict him, which would have barred Trump from ever again becoming president.



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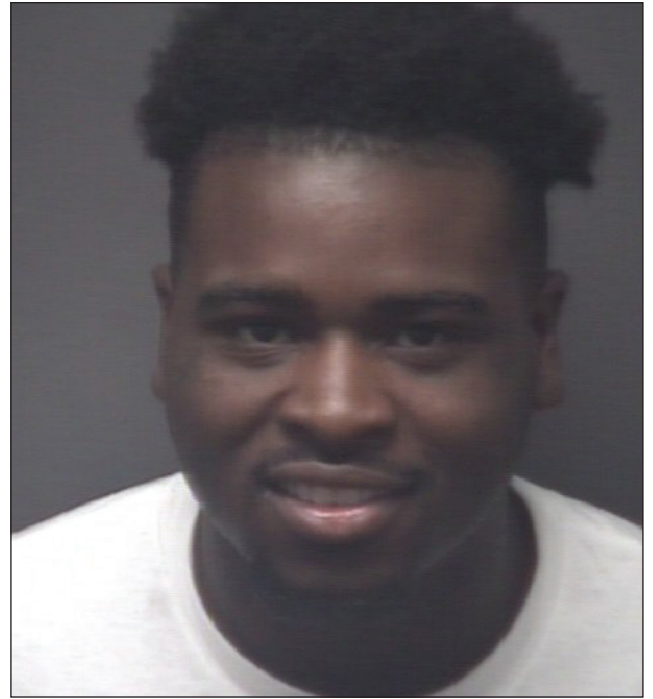
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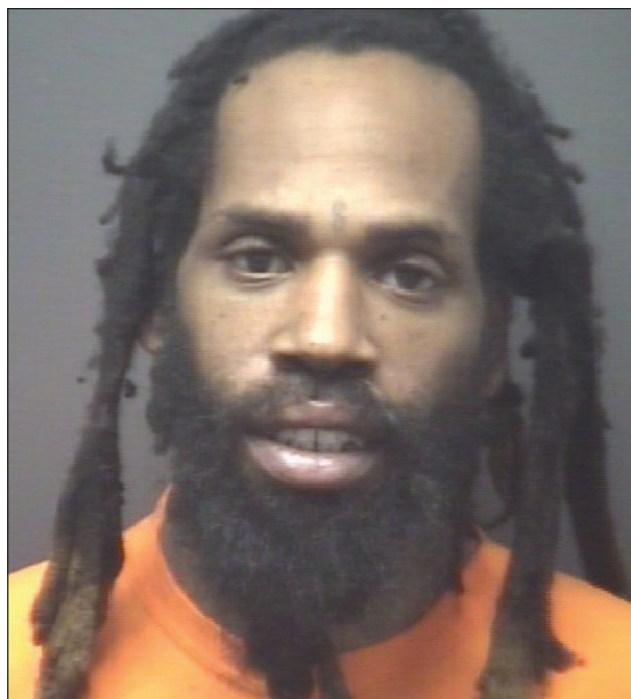
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Tennis: American Casey Kania gets 2-year ban for positive marijuana test



Alex Butler

Feb. 27 (UPI) -- American tennis player Casey Kania is suspended for two years for testing positive for marijuana during an ATP Challenger competition, the International Tennis Integrity Agency announced Tuesday.

Officials said Kania violated the Tennis Anti-Doping Program (TADP) when he provided an in-competition urine sample last August at the tournament in Cary, N.C. The sample was found to contain cannabis, which is banned in competition because of its presence on the World Anti-Doping Agency's prohibited list.

A Nov. 7 laboratory analysis confirmed the presence of cannabis in the sample, leading Kania to be charged with the anti-doping violation.

"The ITIA accepted that Kania did not intentionally breach the provisions of the TADP, but the player was

unable to demonstrate that they bore no fault or negligence for their violation," the ITIA said in a news release.

The ITIA said intentional violations warrant a four-year sanction. Kania's two-year ban started Feb. 2 and will end Feb. 1, 2026.

Kania's results, rankings points and prize money from the Cary Challenger are disqualified.

The former University of North Carolina player is now prohibited from participating in, coaching at or attending any tennis event associated with the ITIA, including the ATP, ITF, WTA, Tennis Australia, French Tennis Federation, Wimbledon and USTA. All four Grand Slam tournaments fall under that umbrella.

Kania, 25, lost in the doubles quarterfinals of the ATP Challenger tournament. He totaled \$482 in prize money and achieved a career-high ranking of 1,317.

Cavs' Max Strus drills 59-foot buzzer-beater to edge Mavericks

Alex Butler

Feb. 28 (UPI) -- Max Strus took just one dribble off an inbound pass, elevated and heaved a two-handed shot from 59 feet, draining the attempt at the final buzzer to lead the Cleveland Cavaliers to a hectic win over the Dallas Mavericks.

The Cavaliers forward made all five of the 3-pointers he took over the final 3:42 of the 121-119 win Tuesday at Rocket Mortgage Fieldhouse in Cleveland. Strus was 7 of 10 overall from distance, totaling 21 points for the Cavaliers.

"It felt good," Strus, who hit four 3-pointers in a 67-second fourth-quarter span, told reporters. "The last five of them felt pretty good."

The Mavericks outscored the Cavaliers 50-42 in the paint, but were edged 21-15 off fast breaks and 30-17 off the bench. The game featured 24 lead changes.

All-Star guard Luka Doncic scored 11 points in the first quarter to help the Mavericks carry a 24-23 lead into the second. He poured in another 16 over the next 12 minutes, but the Cavaliers outscored the Mavericks 37-32 in the quarter and led 60-56 at the break.

Mavericks guard Kyrie Irving scored 12 in the third quarter, helping his team carry an 83-82 edge into the fourth.

Both teams set the nets on fire in the fourth, with the Cavaliers and Mavericks shooting 70% and 66.7%, respectively. They continued to exchange the lead until the Mavericks went on a 12-1 run to take a 108-98 edge with 4:38 remaining.

Strus hit his first 3-pointer of the quarter with the Cavaliers trailing 110-100. He proceeded to hit his next three shots from downtown as part of a 15-3

See DRILLS, page 9



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Dolphins 'very encouraged' by contract talks with QB Tua Tagovailoa



Alex Butler

INDIANAPOLIS, Feb. 27 (UPI) -- The Miami Dolphins are "very encouraged" about their negotiations with Tua Tagovailoa's agents as they work toward a long-term contract extension, coach Mike McDaniell told reporters Tuesday in Indianapolis.

"I'm very encouraged," McDaniell said at the NFL scouting combine at the Indiana Convention Center. "Both Tua's representation, and our organization, are hard at work."

"Those timelines are impossible to predict. My main concern this off-season has been communicating what Tua needs from his head coach and his offensive coaching staff, which is, what things can we identify to continue the progression of your game, the same way that we have since Day 1."

Tagovailoa enters the off-season on the heels of the best year of his career. The No. 5 overall pick in the 2020 NFL Draft completed a career-best 69.3% of his throws, while totaling a league-high 4,624 passing yards, 29 scores and 14 interceptions in 17 starts.

He is set to play the 2024 campaign fifth-year option of his rookie contract, valued at \$23.1 million. Tagovailoa told reporters earlier this month at the Pro Bowl that he believes he will agree to an off-season extension.

"I'm gonna let my agents, gonna let [general manager] Chris Grier, Mike [McDaniell] and those guys talk about that and let them move forward accordingly," Tagovailoa said.

Grier told reporters in January that it is the Dolphins' "goal" to have Tagovailoa remain with the Dolphins "long term [and] playing at a high level."

McDaniell said his belief in Tagovailoa "has always been strong," but it is now stronger than it was the first day he met the quarterback. Several quarterbacks from the same draft class as Tagovailoa received major contract extension last off-season.

Cincinnati Bengals star Joe Burrow, the top pick in 2020, signed a five-year, \$275 million pact in September. That deal included \$219 million guaranteed. Los Angeles Chargers quarterback Justin Herbert signed a five-year, \$262.5 million extension in July. That pact featured \$218.7 million guaranteed.

The Philadelphia Eagles signed quarterback Jalen Hurts to a five-year, \$255 million pact, including \$179.3 million guaranteed, in April.

Drills

continued from page 8

run, giving the Cavaliers a 115-113 advantage with 1:52 remaining.

Mavericks forward Josh Green tied the game with a dunk about a minute later, but Cavaliers guard Donovan Mitchell responded with a 3-pointer on the next possession. Irving then cut the deficit to one point with a floater before forward P.J. Washington gave the Mavericks the lead on a layup with three seconds remaining.

Cavaliers forward Evan Mobley took the ball to the baseline and threw it to Strus for the final play of the night.

The sharpshooter caught the pass, took his final dribble and let it fly for the game-winning basket. He was then mobbed by elated teammates in celebration of the victory.

Mitchell led the Cavaliers with 31 points. Center Jarrett Allen chipped in 19. Doncic totaled 45 points, 14 assists and nine rebounds for the Mavericks. Irving logged 30 points, six rebounds and three assists.

The Cavaliers (38-19) will battle the Chicago Bulls (27-31) at 8 p.m. EST Wednesday in Chicago. The Mavericks (33-25) will face the Toronto Raptors (22-36) at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday in Toronto.

Tennis: Saudi Arabian PIF to sponsor ATP rankings, advertise at tournaments

By Alex Butler

Feb. 28 (UPI) -- Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund and the ATP, the premier men's tennis tour, agreed to a five-year sponsorship for tournament branding and the naming rights of the world rankings, the parties announced Wednesday.

The PIF will partner with the ATP Tour for branding at its events in Indian Wells, Calif., Miami, Madrid, Beijing, at the Nitto ATP Finals in Turin, Italy, and the Next Gen ATP Finals (a 21-and-under event), which will be held in Jeddah until 2027.

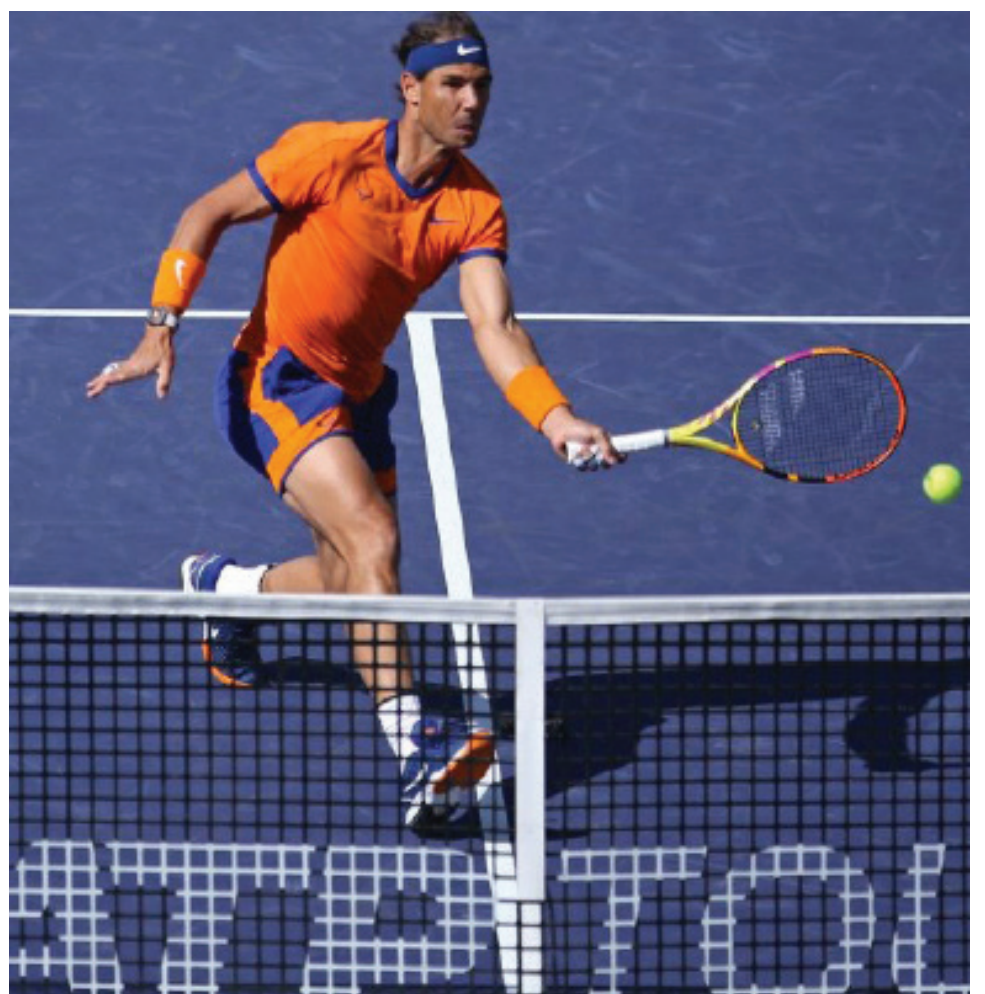
"Our strategic partnership with PIF marks a major moment for tennis," ATP CEO Massimo Calvelli said in a news release. "It's a shared commitment to propel the future of the sport."

"With PIF's dedication to the next generation -- fostering innovation and creating opportunities for all -- the stage is set for a transformative new period of progress."

The ATP's partnership with the PIF came after tennis legends Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova wrote an op-ed for the Washington Post, urging the WTA -- the premier women's tennis tour -- to stay out of Saudi Arabia amid its business negotiations with the kingdom.

It also follows the multi-year feud between Saudi-financed LIV Golf and the PGA Tour, which included several legal battles, before the parties agreed to merge forces to form another league.

Saudi Arabia also invest-



ed heavily into other sports, including soccer, recruiting top players Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar Jr., Karim Benzema and others to play in its Pro League. Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe were among the top players to turn down lucrative offers to leave their European teams for spots in the Saudi Pro League.

Those in opposition of Saudi Arabia's injection into major, U.S.-based sports leagues have cited the kingdom's human rights record, history of women's inequality and its connection to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

"Taking a tournament there would represent a

significant step backward, to the detriment not just of women's sport, but women," Evert and Navratilova wrote.

The Middle Eastern country experienced some social reform in recent years, granting women the right to drive and changing other laws that controlled women, but they are still required to dress modestly and restricted by other mandates. The kingdom also still criminalizes same-sex relations, with punishments including imprisonment, death and flogging.

"As PIF expands its portfolio of innovative sponsorships, our commitment to 'Invested in Better' remains

unwavering," PIF spokesman Mohamed AlSayed said. "Through our collaboration with ATP, PIF will be a catalyst for growth of the global tennis landscape, developing talent, fostering inclusivity and driving sustainable innovation."

"This strategic partnership aligns with our broader vision to enhance quality of life and drive transformation in sport both within Saudi and across the world."

Saudi Arabia reported that registered tennis players in the country increased by 46% from 2019 and 2023. The kingdom first hosted the Next Gen ATP Finals in 2023.

Vikings, Raiders douse trade rumors for WRs Justin Jefferson, Davante Adams

Alex Butler

INDIANAPOLIS, Feb. 27 (UPI) -- Minnesota Vikings and Las Vegas Raiders decision-makers squashed trade rumors for their top wide receivers, telling reporters Tuesday in Indianapolis that Justin Jefferson and Davante Adams remained on their rosters.

Jefferson is set to play the 2024 campaign on the \$19.7 million option year of his rookie contract. He remains involved in negotiations with the Vikings for what is expected to be a record-breaking contract extension. He also negotiated with the Vikings last off-season, before the parties broke off talks.

The three-time Pro Bowl selection and 2022 All-Pro led the NFL with 128 catches for 1,809 yards and eight touchdowns in 2022. He missed seven games in 2023 because of a

hamstring injury.

"We've said it and we'll continue to say it: We think he's the best wide receiver in the league and should be compensated as such," Vikings general manager Kwesi Adofo-Mensah said Tuesday inside a ballroom at the Indiana Convention Center.

"We think he's the one of the best non-quarterbacks in the league and think he should be compensated as such. We'll continue to have those dialogues and conversations."

Adofo-Mensah said he "promised" Jefferson's representatives that he would not openly discuss negotiations and that he hasn't thought about potentially trading arguably the best wide receiver in the NFL.

"That is not something that's once crossed my mind," Adofo-Mensah said. "You've gotta blue-chip player, a blue-chip person, you try to keep as

many of those as you can." Adams, who signed a five-year, \$140 million contract with the Raiders in 2022, is not due for a new pact, but also has been mentioned in trade rumors over the last several seasons.

Raiders general manager Tom Telesco flatly shut down that speculation by telling reporters: "He's a

Raider," when asked about a potential trade.

Adams, a six-time Pro Bowl selection and three-time All-Pro, totaled 100 catches for 1,516 yards and a league-high 14 touchdowns in 2022, his first season with the Raiders. He logged 103 catches for 1,144 yards and eight scores in 17 starts last season.



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La Voz Latina

Live music stimulates brain more than recorded songs



Dennis Thompson, HealthDay News

Live musical performances speak to the soul, stimulating the brain in ways more powerful than listening to a recorded tune does, new research finds.

“Our study showed that pleasant and unpleasant emotions performed as live music elicited much higher and more consistent activity in the amygdala

[the emotional center of the brain] than recorded music,” said lead researcher Sascha Fruhholz, a professor of cognitive and affective neuroscience at the University of Zurich in Switzerland.

“The live performance also stimulated a more active exchange of information in the whole brain, which points to strong emotional processing in the affective and cognitive

parts of the brain,” Fruhholz added in a university news release.

Music can have a strong effect on emotions, and prior studies have shown that listening to recorded music stimulates emotional and imaginative processes in the brain, researchers said.

But it’s not clear whether listening to music in a live setting -- at a music festival, rock concert, op-

era performance or piano bar -- triggers a different response in the brain, researchers said.

To examine this, researchers performed MRI brain scans on the amygdala of 27 people as they listened to a pianist playing live music.

During the performance, the pianist adapted his performance to intensify the audience’s emotions, based on the MRI feedback.

The participants also listened to a recorded copy of the same music played by the same musician.

Only live music showed a strong and positive coupling between the features of the musical performance and brain activity in listeners, researchers found.

Live music also caused a strong synchronization between their emotional experience and the auditory brain system -- the part of the brain that assesses music according to its acoustic quality. Recorded music didn’t have this effect.

Given all this, researchers concluded that the experience of attending a live concert cannot be replicated by listening to recorded music at home.

The new study was published Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

“This can perhaps be traced back to the evolutionary roots of music,” Fruhholz said. “People want the emotional experience of live music. We want musicians to take us on an emotional journey with their performances.”

Soccer: Striker Kylian Mbappe to leave PSG after season

Alex Butler

Feb. 15 (UPI) -- Star striker Kylian Mbappe told Paris Saint-Germain that he plans to leave the French Ligue 1 team after the season.

Sources told ESPN, CBS Sports and The Athletic about the move Thursday afternoon.

Mbappe, who has long been linked to Spanish La Liga franchise Real Madrid, totaled 20 goals and four assists through 19 Ligue 1 games this season. He scored 31 times in 30 total matches during his ongoing 2023-24 campaign.

Mbappe totaled 31 goals in 43 games last season. He logged 39 goals in 46 games in 2021-22. The star striker, who first went on loan from Monaco in 2017, scored more than 200 goals during his PSG tenure.

The 25-year-old made his senior career debut in 2015 at Monaco. He scored 16 times in 41 appearances for that Ligue 1 club. Mbappe also scored 46 goals in 75 appearances for the French national team. He helped France win the World Cup in 2018 and finish second in 2022.

Mbappe won the Golden Boot (top scorer) and the Silver Ball (second-most outstanding player) at the 2022 World Cup. He also set a record for the most goals (three) scored in a final, which France lost to Lionel Messi and Argentina.

Mbappe scored in the 58th minute of PSG’s 2-0 win over Real Sociedad in the first leg of their Round of 16 series Wednesday in Paris.

PSG will battle Nantes in a Ligue 1 game at 3 p.m. EST Saturday in Nantes, France. A total of 17 matches remain on PSG’s 2023-24 Ligue 1 schedule.

PSG, which won the last two league titles, is in first place in the Ligue 1 standings.

Liverpool soccer star Mohamed Salah in doubt for Carabao Cup final

Alex Butler

Feb. 23 (UPI) -- Injured Liverpool striker Mohamed Salah’s appearance is doubtful in the Reds’ matchup with rival Chelsea in the 2024 Carabao Cup final, assistant manager Pepijn Lijnders told reporters Friday.

“With Dominik [Szoboszlai], Darwin [Nunez] and Mo [Salah], we really have to see,” Lijnders said of injured Liverpool players. “We have two more days, today’s session, tomorrow’s session and then last-minute.”

“We will check if they can be there. It would be great, to be honest.”

Salah, who is dealing with a hamstring issue, was a late first-half substitute in the Reds’ 4-1 win over Brentford on Saturday in Brentford, England. He scored and logged an assist in that victory. Salah then missed the Reds’ next game, a 4-1 win over Luton Town on Wednesday in Liverpool, England.

Salah sustained the initial hamstring injury Jan. 18 during an Africa Cup of Nations appearance for Egypt. He missed eight Liverpool games before returning to the Reds’ lineup against Brentford.

Nunez, another forward, also played against Brentford, but missed the Luton Town match. Szoboszlai is dealing with a hamstring issue. The midfielder hasn’t played since January.

Defender Trent Alexander-Arnold (knee), goalie Alisson Becker (leg muscle), midfielder Curtis Jones (ankle) and forward/midfielder Diogo Jota (knee) are among the Reds players already ruled out against Chelsea.

The Reds and Blues will meet at 10 a.m. EST Sunday in London at Wembley Stadium in London. The final caps of the Carabao Cup -- also known as the EFL Cup -- which includes teams within each of the Top 4 levels of the English football system.

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