



New e-bike laws coming to Connecticut this October

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The classification of e-bikes and who's allowed to ride them are changing tomorrow, based on a new law in Connecticut that targets young e-bike riders and speed modifications.

The law comes after a 350% increase from 2024 to 2025 in fatal crashes between bikes, both electric and non-electric, and automobiles, according to The Hartford Courant.

The definition of an e-bike is changing to distinguish bikes with 750 to 3,500 watts of power as "motor-driven cycles," which require driver's

licenses to ride, according to the HB-6862 bill. E-bike modifications are also subject to fines if it changes the motor engagement in ways noncompliant to the law. The fine is less than \$100 dollars at first but can be raised up to \$300 for subsequent offenses.

If an e-bike has 3,500 watts or more, the law will now classify it as a motor-driven vehicle. E-bikes beyond the 3,700 watts threshold are further distinguished as motorcycles which need a license with a motorcycle endorsement to ride.

The capabilities of e-bikes on the market and how people use them have become more of a concern with this increase in fatalities. Connecticut Insider reported that some e-bikes currently being sold have speed capabilities of up to 70 mph.

The Connecticut General Assembly previously only classified three different distinctions of e-bikes, which all require operable foot pedals, an electric motor and less than 750 watts of power to be considered an e-bike, according to a 2018 bill.

The first classification is "Class 1," where the motor can only engage when the rider is using the foot pedals and the motor disengages when the rider stops pedaling or when it hits the top speed of 20 mph.

The second classification is "Class 2," where the mo-

tor can engage when the rider pedals or with a throttle controlling the electric motor and the motor disengages when the brakes are applied or when it hits the top speed of 20 mph.

The third classification is "Class 3," where the motor can only engage when the rider is using the foot pedals and the motor disengages when the rider stops pedaling or it hits the top speed of 28 mph.

The new law addresses the gray area left out of these classifications regarding how an e-bike with over 750 watts of power should be classified legally.

The president of the Electric Vehicle Club of Connecticut, Barry Kresch, said his fleet of electric vehicles taught him how quick the technology can evolve. Kresch noted how his first EV was a 2012 Chevrolet Volt that got 38 miles of electric range before the gas motor kicked in. One of his current Tesla Model 3s gets 325 miles of range and only runs on electricity.

Kresch's knowledge about the speed at which electric models progress came with safety concerns over sharing the roadways with riders of e-scooters and e-bikes.

"Micro mobility presents some unique challenges, because if you're on the street you're the smallest thing," Kresch said. "If you're on the sidewalk, you're the biggest thing. We don't have a lot of



An e-bike resting on a kickstand. Laws regarding electric bike usage are set to change in Connecticut starting Oct. 1. PHOTO COURTESY OF ADOBE STOCK

protected lanes, so I think the legislature was right to define different capabilities of these vehicles."

The Southern New England manager at the East Coast Greenway Alliance, Bruce Donald, supports the new legislation overall, but remained hesitant on some key aspects.

"When we're looking at enforcement, we need to be careful that we are not cutting down on lawful and correct usage and providing barriers of entry for people [instead]," Donald said.

Donald added that his support of the law came from his efforts in maintaining accessible trail systems in Connecticut.

"The people we're building bike trails for are, what I like to exemplify as, grandparents with a couple of eight and 10-year-old grandkids," Donald said. "Those people, we want to be able to use these facilities and feel safe."

Aside from adding regulations to increasingly powerful e-bikes, the new law also expands the age range of helmet laws to improve safety.

Helmet laws used to only require riders who were 17-years old or younger to wear helmets when on both motor-driven cycles and motorcycles. Starting on Oct. 1, the age range will increase to require 18, 19 and 20-year-olds to wear a helmet or be fined \$90 or more.



An electric bike parked on a street. New rules are coming for E-transport within the state of Connecticut. PHOTO COURTESY OF ERIK MCLEAN ON PEXELS.COM

Mansfield Senior Center celebrates

50 years

by Kitan Arolet
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MANSFIELD, Conn. – The Mansfield Senior Center celebrated 50 years of operation and its "Senior Center Month" this September.

The Mansfield Senior Center has been creating a community for older Mansfield residents since 1975. Starting off with 112 attendees, the Mansfield Senior Center has expanded and now serves 850 individuals of

age 55 and older, according to a Mansfield Senior Center press release.

According to the Mansfield Senior Center's website, their mission is to "provide a wide variety of programs and services designed to meet the diverse and ever-changing needs of Seniors in our community."

The center provides activities for Mansfield seniors such as organized trips, exercise programs, birthday parties and music. With September being "Senior Center Month," the

Mansfield Senior Center invites seniors to join the community and participate in numerous special events.

"This month is a great time to come and explore what we may have to offer you or your loved one," said Jessica Tracy, the center's supervisor. "Whether you are just looking for a social outlet and camaraderie, have a specific pastime you enjoy, could benefit from rides to local medical appointments or our support groups or just want to indulge in an affordable house-prepared



MANSFIELD SENIOR CENTER

The Mansfield Senior Center logo. The Mansfield Senior Center celebrates 50 years of operation this month. PHOTO COURTESY OF @MANSFIELDSENIORCENTER INSTAGRAM



Senior citizens celebrating their birthdays at the Mansfield Senior Center. Those ages 55 or older can enjoy a wide variety of programs and services offered by the senior center. PHOTO COURTESY OF @MANSFIELDSENIORCENTER INSTAGRAM

lunch, we welcome anyone age 55 and older to join us."

Tracy said they work to create a vibrant and inclusive environment. To celebrate Senior Center month and the 50th anniversary, staff at the Mansfield Senior Center hosted a variety show on Sept. 25.

Ryan Aylesworth, the town manager, said the Mansfield Senior Center is a great community for the town and is a resource for older residents to find connections and support.

"The center is not only a hub for programs and services but also a true place of fellowship where friendships are formed and lives are enriched," Ayles-

worth said. "Whether it's woodcarving and crafting, tying shirts for a 60s celebration, stopping by for a coffee or a special holiday banquet, there's always laughter and warmth within the center."

As the month of September comes to an end, Tracy said they plan to keep growing their services and creating an empowering community for their seniors.

"We hope that all residents will take the time to stop in during this 50th year celebration to see the center, learn about the amazing programs and care that takes place there," Aylesworth said.

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News

In Conversation with Tim Morse: Getting behind this year's occupational disease report

by **Angel De Jesus**
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The annual occupational disease report for Connecticut was released to the public on Sept. 1. It has been the responsibility of one man for the past 25 years: Tim Morse, professor emeritus in Occupational and Environmental Medicine and the Department of Community Medicine at the University of Connecticut.

The occupational disease report showcases a tally of every recorded instance of occupational disease in the state of Connecticut for the year 2023. Occupational disease can include anything from musculoskeletal conditions to infectious disease, among other things.

The data organized within the report is sourced from three databases: Workers' Compensation First Report of Injury cases, Physician Report of Occupational Disease under the Occupational Illnesses and Injury Surveillance System and the Bureau of Labor Statistics/Connecticut Department of Labor Annual Survey.

"Doctors don't get paid to find out where diseases come from," Morse said. Instead, Morse said they are paid to treat them. As such, the Connecticut occupational disease report seeks to investigate the origin of disease that affects a large portion of the population: workers.

The production of this report came out of a public act. As a result, UConn and Yale receive funding in order to support the creation of these reports every year. Its production relies on the collaboration between occupational health clinics, the Workers Compensation Commission and the Department of Labor.

These institutions provide and organize the raw data independently of each other, so it is up to Morse to hash all of the information together. He said this process can be quite involved.

Sometimes an incident will be reported to two different institutions or just one of them, according to Morse. As a result, sometimes the different databases make it appear as if there are more instances of occupational disease than there really are, as the same case can be reported twice.

In order to create more accurate data, Morse said he



The Pepper Center, one of UConn Health's locations. The center is named after late senator Claude D. Pepper.
PHOTO COURTESY OF UCONN HEALTH

employs capture/recapture analysis, a method of research popular among ecologists, to estimate the net number of reported cases.

Sorting through and making sense of this raw data takes the most time, according to Morse.

"The data is difficult to interpret," Morse said. "You can't tell what's a change in exposure or a change in reporting."

The demographic with the most incidents is the government sector, which includes police, firefighters and health-care workers.

The government sector has the highest number of incidents because of several factors, according to Morse. Morse says government jobs tend to be unionized, have good reporting, good health-care and high awareness of occupational disease.

Many instances of blood-borne disease exposure actually come from human bites, Morse said. Physicians are required by law to report bites to the Occupational Illnesses and Injury Surveillance System. Workers from the Department of Children and Families, as well as corrections officers, are the most

prone to bites according to the report.

The report showed that some towns had many more incidents than others, and they weren't in the cities. Vernon, Meriden, East Hampton, Westbrook and Groton had the highest numbers for varied reasons. Groton, for instance, is home to General Dynamics Electric Boat, a submarine construction fa-

cility that has supplied the U.S. Navy for over a century. Morse said 193 of the 227 cases reported in the town came from submarine building.

Morse expressed a desire to publish a supplemental report along with the main occupational disease report for next year.

"The goal of this supplemental report would be to summarize the available lit-

erature in a way that makes it accessible to people without making it seem every occupation is at risk for everything," Morse said.

Morse said that there are obstacles to getting this report published.

"Funding agencies are small and getting cut under [the Trump] administration," Morse said. "There's not much research as a result."

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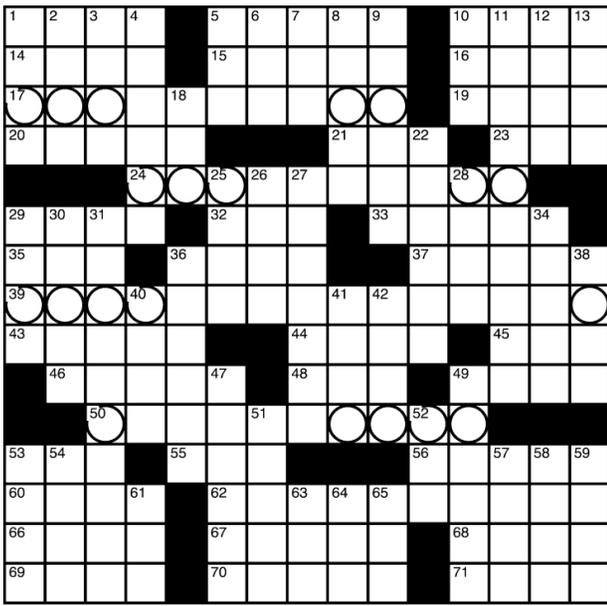
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- ACROSS**
- 1 "Power Up" rock band
 - 5 Farfalle or fusilli
 - 10 Follow a command
 - 14 Bring to a bubble
 - 15 Helps with the dishes
 - 16 Jakarta's island
 - 17 Documents submitted after a fender bender
 - 19 Mix
 - 20 Alabama march city
 - 21 Detectives, briefly
 - 23 Like antiques
 - 24 "I thought you just left!"
 - 29 Includes furtively on an email
 - 32 Sippy cup user
 - 33 The "I" of IV
 - 35 "I'm so relaxed!"
 - 36 Fly like a hawk
 - 37 Make reparations
 - 39 Is a trailblazer
 - 43 Centipede maker
 - 44 "Consequently ..."
 - 45 "Don't be that ___"
 - 46 Snooping sorts
 - 48 Gear tooth
 - 49 Animation frames
 - 50 Six-time "Dancing With the Stars" champion
 - 53 "Ewe talking to me?"
 - 55 ___ Lanka
 - 56 Wear away
 - 60 Crafts partner
 - 62 Wealthy, and what 17-, 24-, 39-, and 50-Across literally are
 - 66 Hide-and-___
 - 67 Alternative to Midol
 - 68 Image reshared for laughs
 - 69 "Nothing to it!"
 - 70 Makes it to the end
 - 71 Spanish "those"
- DOWN**
- 1 Preschool basics
 - 2 Spouse of "Riverdale"
 - 3 Rotary phone part
 - 4 Tackles a rock face
 - 5 File format for some invoices
 - 6 ___/ace: LGBT+ orientation
 - 7 Title for the Black Knight
 - 8 Pace set by a metronome
 - 9 Home of St. Francis
 - 10 Some brunch drinks, for short
 - 11 Mall of Louisiana city
 - 12 Rather wicked
 - 13 Place for a swing set
 - 18 "Ewe OK?"
 - 22 Acoustic location devices
 - 25 Execs behind R&D breakthroughs
 - 26 Zen master's paradox
 - 27 Loosen up before exercising
 - 28 Uno less than nove
 - 29 Daddy, in Chinese
 - 30 Golf course rentals
 - 31 Companions who don't mind fast food
 - 34 Void
 - 36 Racers who make tracks
 - 38 Ben & Jerry's rival
 - 40 "Brown Skin" singer India
 - 41 "What a thrill!"
 - 42 "Loki" actress Mbatha-Raw
 - 47 Story told in episodes
 - 49 Safari alternative
 - 51 In a way, casually
 - 52 Diamond or ruby
 - 53 First coat of paint
 - 54 ___ rug: floor decor
 - 57 Tip jar bills
 - 58 Showroom model
 - 59 Organs closed during sleep
 - 61 Cloud location
 - 63 Sets in hotel rooms
 - 64 Smashing success
 - 65 Golf great Ernie



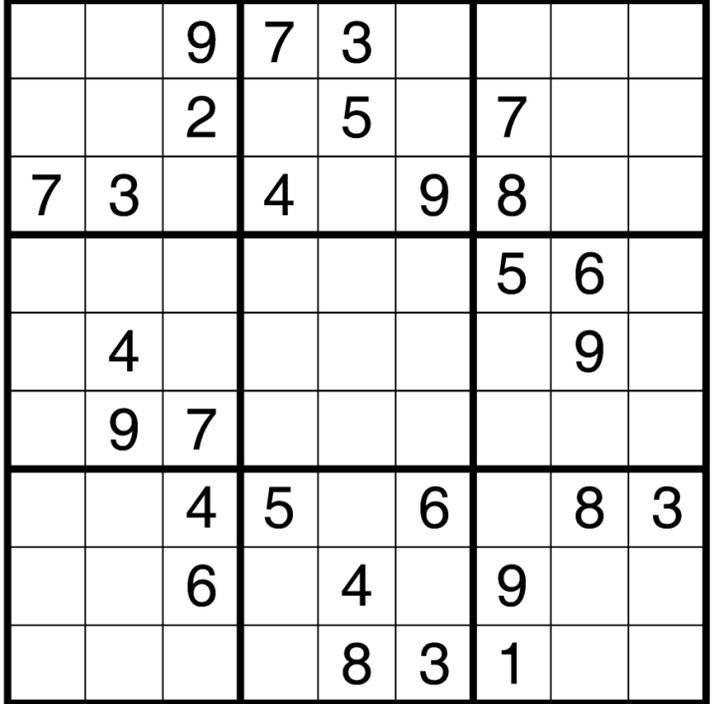
By Zhouqin Burnikel 9/30/25

Monday's Puzzle Solved

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

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Level **1** 2 3 4



Solution to Monday's puzzle 9/30/25

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

Complete the grid so each row, column and 3-by-3 box (in bold borders) contains every digit 1 to 9. For strategies on how to solve Sudoku, visit sudoku.org.uk.

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Person riding a CT Fastrak bus, and CT Fastrak busses at a stop. The CT Fastrak is the state's first "bus rapid transit" system. CREDIT: @CTFASTRAK_CONNECTICUT ON INSTAGRAM

by Patrick Boots
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Imagine traveling throughout Connecticut without sitting in gridlock, hunting for parking or stressing about the time. CT Fastrak, the state's first "bus rapid transit" system, achieves this — it's designed to move travelers quickly between central towns and downtown Hartford. We'll spill the beans on everything you need to know to ride with confidence.

The trick? CT Fastrak uses a bus-only roadway with station stops — much like a train or subway system — and is designed with high frequency in mind, so riders never have to wait long. Since the buses don't travel on the highways or town roads for most of their journey, they bypass traffic congestion and can maintain reliable travel times.

First operating its innovative service in 2015, the system was ranked as the number one BRT network in the country in 2024.

There are 11 stations on the route, spanning four towns:

Downtown New Britain, East Main Street and East Street in New Britain; Cedar Street and Newington Junction in Newington; Elmwood and Flatbush Avenue in West Hartford; and Kane Street, Parkville and Sigourney Street in Hartford. Fastrak also connects with trains and regional bus services at Hartford Union Station, and limited service to other points in downtown Hartford.

The buses on Fastrak are modern, comfortable and equipped with free Wi-Fi and bicycle racks. Many of them are articulated buses (those long, bendy ones) — which means there's plenty of room even during rush hour.

University of Connecticut students may be interested to know that CT Transit's Route 913, the express bus that runs from UConn to Hartford, can take you directly to Hartford Union Station and the Sigourney Street Fastrak station.

Students can use their U-Pass for free travel on CT Fastrak with no limitation. The fares are also reasonable, with

a two-hour unlimited pass costing \$1.75 — and an all-day ticket at just \$3.50. They can be used on both Fastrak trips and on local CT Transit buses, many of which connect at the stations; ticket VTMs are available at every Fastrak station and in numerous on-street locations in downtown Hartford.

There are five "core" trip variants form the backbone of the Fastrak system: Route 101, which makes every stop from Hartford to Downtown New Britain; 102, which is the same, but runs further to Bristol; 121, which has two variants: one that deviates from the Fastrak to stop at UConn John Dempsey Hospital and another which travels eastward to Manchester Community College — otherwise stopping at the stations between Cedar Street and Hartford; 125, which runs to Newington Junction and then to the Berlin Turnpike; and 128, which goes to Flatbush Avenue and then to the Westfarms Mall in Farmington.

A handful of other local-ish routes are also operated under

Navigating Transportation in Connecticut: 'Express' Yourself with Fastrak

the CT Fastrak system, as they may stop at one or two stations, but most do not use the bus-only roadway — such as a shuttle for students to the nearby Central Connecticut State University campus in New Britain. Some of CT Transit's express bus routes also make use of the traffic-skipping roadway.

A great amenity of this system is a multi-use trail for the length of the roadway from Downtown New Britain to Newington Junction. Pedestrians and cyclists can travel alongside the Fastrak on the paved walkway, bring their pets and enjoy the scenery from dawn to dusk daily. However, the trail is not regularly cleared of debris, snow, or ice, so trail-users should be vigilant.

Although the Fastrak stations are outdoors, they are large and well-lit, with spacious waiting areas (plus heaters for the cold seasons), digital messaging signage and clearly marked crosswalks and wayfinding. Ample parking is also available at many of the stations.

While the concept of CT

Fastrak may have been better served by light rail or subway-like infrastructure, it is no secret that it is an efficient, highly trafficked system even with buses being used. There are some plans to expand Fastrak to other spokes of Hartford, such as to Middletown, Manchester and north to Bradley International Airport — with studies determining the feasibility of using train equipment and sharing the right-of-way with freight users and others — but those are a long way away from implementation. Judging by the success of the New Britain-bound Fastrak, I would imagine the state would support any plan to invest in Connecticut's rapid transit if the funding appeared.

CT Fastrak offers a faster, cleaner and more reliable way to get around central Connecticut. Whether you're commuting to work, exploring downtown Hartford or eventually traveling to UConn, the system is designed to make your trip smoother. Enjoy speeding along!

A SCIENTIST, ARTIST, AND ENGINEER WALK INTO A ROOM

CLIPART COURTESY OF CREATIVE COMMONS



The Benton Museum on the UConn Campus. The museum recently held a discussion related to their new Cloud exhibition. CREDIT: @BENTONMUSEUMUCONN ON INSTAGRAM

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The Benton Museum held a discussion related to their recently opened Clouds exhibition, titled "Clouds: A Discussion at the Intersection of Art, Science and Engineering" on Sept. 25. The three panelists of varying disciplines discussed cloud-related topics such as how clouds relate to their work, clouds' impact on climate change and the effect art can have on its audience.

The discussion was moderated by George Matheou, an associate professor in the school of Mechanical, Aerospace and Manufacturing Engineering (SoMAM). Matheou is well-known for his research in computational fluid dynamics.

The panelists consisted of Ann Fridlind, a physical scientist at the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS), who is researching how each cloud type can affect the weather and climate change. Helen Glazer is a visual artist from Baltimore, Md., whose work blends photography and sculptures.

Lastly, there was Miad Yazdani, a principal fellow at the RTX Research Center (RTRC).

"RTX gives a few people the most challenging and complex problems to solve, and I am one of those people," Yazdani said about his role at the RTRC.

Matheou's first question to the three panelists was about the role clouds play in their work. Fridlind called clouds "the enormous thermostat of Earth," due to their ability to reflect solar power from the sun and for trapping heat and moisture. Fridlind also argued that clouds and their physics make it hard to determine how fast temperatures have risen due to greenhouse gases, or in finding a terminal temperature for an emissions scenario.

Glazer observed that many people have likely tried to find faces, objects and shapes within clouds in order to relate these abstract objects to known concepts. This was one reason for Glazer's obsession with clouds. Another reason came up when Glazer started looking at photos of fluid dynamics experiments, seeing the uniform motion of air become disordered in a fraction of a second. She reasoned that

photography can be a method to capture this ordered chaos.

Because he works for an aerospace company, Yazdani is concerned about clouds in relation to aviation, particularly on how to reduce aviation's effects on climate change. Interestingly, aviation's primary cause to climate change is not carbon dioxide emissions, but contrails — the white plumes of gas coming off an aircraft's exhaust. These plumes, which contain a mixture of water vapor and other particulars found in an aircraft engine, trap outgoing radiation from below. He wants to build a contrail forecast so that he can predict when contrails form, how long they'll last and quantify their effects on climate change.

Matheou asked the trio how they deal with the "transient nature of clouds."

Yazdani and Fridlind both discussed the challenges of building a forecast of cloud movement and formation, as one needs to build it on both a large and small scale. Yazdani needs a 12-hour forecast for a cloud that an aircraft will zip through in seconds. Fridlind talks about using supercom-

puters to compute the interaction between the atmosphere and the ocean that progresses over hundreds of years.

Glazer, continuing her previous point on capturing cloud movement through photography, says that photos can capture the transience of clouds as well. She talks about how she takes multiple photos, prints them out and stitches them together to create a panorama. To bring out the cloud's motion even more she paints the print with pastels.

Matheou's final question for the panelists touched on the opportunities and challenges of using visual media to showcase clouds to a public audience.

Glazer talked about how the medium of art can help people become more active in environmental preservation. She argues that if you present art that gets an emotional response from its audience, you will build an emotional connection between art and audience. Thus, if you present nature photos that elicit an emotional response, you will get more people involved in the wellbeing of the environment and its preservation.

Yazdani talked about how RTX would mount cameras on the back of aircrafts to visualize contrails at different altitudes. Using this visual data, Yazdani found a correlation between local atmospheres and an aircraft's contrail, concluding that less contrails were made closer to the ground.

Fridlind emphasized Glazer's point about art and the emotional responses it gets. She argues that now it is more important than ever for scientists to share their research with the public, in the face of massive budget cuts to research projects. One avenue is through panels like these, which the GISS have done several of at the Hudson River Museum. She thinks another way to engage people with scientific research can be through the "get ready with me" trend on TikTok.

Fridlind suggested these ideas because she thinks more people should learn about the amazing things scientists and researchers are studying in the face of federal funding cuts. To her, "the most exciting scientific research is fundamentally defined at the boundary of what is known and unknown."

the
PODCASTS
you need to listen to in
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ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA ROBY, LIFE DESIGNER

by Jenna Outcalt
NEWS EDITOR
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Whether you're cooking, working out or on a road trip, podcasts are a great way to expand your mind or just enjoy some good laughs. With too many podcasts to count, it can be hard to jump into new ones. But if you know what you're in the mood for, here are a few recommendations to get you started in the wonderful world of podcasts.

If you want to learn...

Ologies: Host Alie Ward interviews an expert in a different field every episode,

finding areas of study you've probably never heard of. You can listen to the episodes in any order or just pick and choose which topics look interesting. That said, this podcast will get you interested in subjects you would have never thought about.

Alie's enthusiasm for every subject is infectious, and the passion of the guests is always contagious enough to give the listener a new appreciation for their field. From the natural sciences to space exploration to societal oddities, Ologies will give you a whole new perspective on the world around you and remind you to ask smart

people stupid questions.

Short History Of...: Do you ever find yourself wishing you knew more about the Suez Canal, the Gunpowder Plot or the time Agatha Christie disappeared for 11 days? This podcast tells the stories of the past in a well-written narrative style. The narrators have excellent pacing, but the real magic is in which stories are told.

This podcast has a knack for choosing the true tales that many have heard of, but few truly know inside and out. The immersive storytelling will give you a whole new appreciation for the fascinating history of the individual people, places and events that formed our modern world.

If you want to laugh...

We're Here to Help: Jake Johnson of "New Girl" fame and Gareth Reynolds, a standup comedian and podcaster, offer advice to listeners who call in with their strangest problems. Callers' issues range from getting caught in lies to planning elaborate parties to convincing a spouse that self-defense lessons are paying off.

Reynolds and Johnson have fantastic comedic chemistry and almost always manage to find a solution that walks the line between hysterically funny and actually feasible for the caller to do. This show also includes follow-up calls, so feel free to get invested in the caller's struggle! **Til Death Do Us Blart:**

This podcast has crossed the line from being a ridiculous comedy roundtable to becoming some kind of bizarre performance art. Every year, podcasting brothers Justin, Travis and Grant McElroy and New Zealand comedians Tim Batt and Guy Montgomery watch and review "Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2." The five of them have committed to doing this every single year for the rest of their lives (hence the podcast's name). Since the movie came out in 2015, there are only 10 episodes so far, in addition to a bonus episode released during the pandemic where they finally review the original "Paul Blart: Mall Cop."

Listening to all the episodes at once is a fascinating study in hearing five grown men lose their minds as they stare down the decision that will follow them for the rest of their time in this world. Episodes release every Thanksgiving, so you'll have something to look forward to if you start listening now.

If you want to get deeply invested in a story:

The Magnus Archives: There's no better time to start this one than the beginning of spooky season. In this narrative podcast, each episode recounts someone's paranormal experience, all logged at the mysterious Magnus Institute by the organization's new archivist. As the podcast

goes on, the skeptical archivist begins to notice connections between the seemingly unrelated statements as the horrors start to bleed through into his own life.

It's best to start this podcast at the beginning and listen in order if you've never heard it before. The way the stories begin to intertwine is a genuinely thrilling experience. Despite the lovable characters and occasional funny moments, this is a horror podcast to the core, so be sure to check episode content warnings. The podcast is 200 relatively short episodes, but a sequel series called "The Magnus Protocol" just concluded its second season and will soon begin releasing its third.

Midnight Burger: Any fan of "Doctor Who" should check out this interdimensional diner and its permanently trapped employees. This podcast has some of the most immediately entertaining characters and purely wacky plots each episode. After mixing in a little well-placed social commentary and a classic found family, you have a recipe for casual entertainment that you'll occasionally find yourself far too invested in.

Whether you're just starting to get into podcasts or you thought you've heard everything out there, I hope this list helps you find your next listen. Go forth and learn, laugh and live all through your headphones this week as you try out these amazing podcasts.



The Midnight Burger podcast logo. The podcast follows an interdimensional diner and its trapped employees. CREDIT: @NADIASPAGES ON INSTAGRAM



"We're Here to Help" podcast hosts Jake Johnson and Gareth Reynolds promoting their new merch. The podcast hosts offer comical advice to their listeners. CREDIT: @HERETOHELPPOD ON INSTAGRAM



Life

THE NEW RUBY LEFTSTEP EP

TED

Behind the scenes of making Ruby Leftstep's new EP

SEPTEMBER 19TH



Thomas Busemeyer, Eddie Dahill and Dylan Hrinda of the band Ruby Leftstep. The bands new EP "Ted" was released Sept. 19. CREDIT: @RUBYLEFTSTEP ON INSTAGRAM

by Dan Stark
LIFE EDITOR
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Ruby Leftstep, the alternative rock band from New Hartford, Conn., released their second extended play, "TED," on Friday, Sept. 19. The release marks the group's first extended EP since their debut effort "The Ground Up" came out in August 2022.

In the last three years since "The Ground Up" came out, a lot has changed for the up-and-coming Ruby Leftstep, including Eddie Dahill switching from bass to drums and the release of five singles. Combined with a consistent schedule of shows in Connecticut and across the northeast, the band has grown to be one of the staple acts in the nutmeg state's DIY scene.

The band started developing the EP in January and spent the first four months of the year writing and figuring out arrangements. They were fueled by a desire to make a record now that they had a better understand of producing, but also one that reflects the current

lineup. This is what led them to re-record "For the Record," a song originally released on "The Ground Up" that has remained a setlist staple for them.

"The last time we recorded, it wasn't with this lineup," said Dahill. "All of the drumming on the first EP isn't me, so I wanted to have 'For the Record' on here because I play it so differently."

The band started recording in May at On Deck Sound Studio in Northfield, Conn., where Dahill works. With each member living in different parts of the state, the group had to make the most of a limited amount of sessions, which was the opposite from their last EP.

"We were kind of writing a lot of 'The Ground Up' as we were recording it because we had more time," said Thom Busemeyer, the group's lead guitarist. "We were all living up in Litchfield County and we could all sit around and noodle. But for this one, we went to the recording studio where Eddie works and tried to be as cohesive as possible."

Dahill echoed similar senti-

ments, saying that "As opposed to the first EP where we're doing nothing all the time, we were doing everything in no time."

The five-song release showcases a variety of sounds, including layers of warm electric guitars, rolling acoustic guitars and perfectly-produced drums. Some of it came effortlessly, with the basic track of "I Told You So" being recorded in one take.

"It started originally because when we would be at a show, especially at a place we never played before and were meeting people, it was hard to remember names... So any of us would respond to Ted."

"How Does It Feel?" provided greater challenges, specifically when it came to recording Busemeyer's multiple guitar layers. He noted that the song "was really hard to record and the main melody part wasn't cutting through

from the drone enough," leading the band having to go back and re-record it. The result was a guitar solo that Dahill says is his favorite that Busemeyer has played with the band.

"Marceline" features guest vocals from Zoë Coz, the first time the band has had a guest on a song. Coz, a friend of the band who now lives in Denver, was sent files of "Marceline" and other songs to record background vocals by the band. A day later, she sent recordings back that the band was impressed by.

The EP's name comes from the first names of each of the band members: Thom, Eddie and Dylan Hrinda, the group's lead singer. Dahill came up with the name before the group started recording and the name stuck throughout the process.

"It started originally because when we would be at a show, especially at a place we never played before and were meeting people, it was hard to remember names," said Busemeyer. "So any of us would respond to Ted."

The songs of "TED" have fit well into the band's setlist

and they've typically played the entire order of the EP consecutively. The EP's closing track "Garbage" is one that they've particularly enjoyed playing live, as Busemeyer said the song's open-D guitar tuning allows him to hit massive, ringing chords.



CREDIT: @RUBYLEFTSTEP ON INSTAGRAM

To commemorate the release of "TED," Ruby Leftstep will be taking the stage at The Dog Pound in Storrs on Friday, Oct. 3, for an hour-and-a-half long performance that they'll be recording to release as a live album. Busemeyer noted that the band plays most of their songs differently live than in their recorded versions. Dahill added that they want to capture the energy of playing DIY venues in Connecticut with the release, especially in Storrs where they have received a lot of support.



Opinion

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WHY DO TRENDS DIE SO QUICKLY?

by Filip Dukovski
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Today, you wake up, put on your pair of jeans with a Labubu hanging on the side, go to the private equity owned cafe to pick up a strawberry matcha latte you ordered on Uber Eats. You walk over to your job, whatever that may be, and clock in for your eight-hour shift. After a long day you take the train home, but on the way to your apartment you see a dessert shop with a poster on the wall plastering the words, "NOW SERVING DUBAI CHOCOLATE." You have 20 bucks in your pocket, so you decide "why not?" and you splurge and buy yourself this sweet treat. When you get into your apartment and jump onto your bed, you scroll through Amazon looking to buy a new Funko Pop from the recent trending movie you saw until you get tired and go to sleep.



Nowadays, it feels like so much of our life is subsumed in trends and consumerism and everything comes and goes far too quickly. While trends always come and go and the cycle of consumerism always eventu-

ally centers its sights on something else, it seemed like the cycle used to last a decent amount longer as compared to now. As well, it feels as though the quality of products and meaning behind trends being produced nowadays has simply gotten worse. Many people may chalk this up to being older and "not understanding the new generation" but I feel that there has been a genuine decline in what is trending. There is less durability in what we buy since many of the manufacturers know that the sales will probably decline after 3 or 4 months.

With the prominence and influence of social media over the years, consumerism has experienced a supercharge in a harmful way. Again, overconsumption is not a new phenomenon and is one of the driving factors of late-stage capitalism, but this drive from social media is new. Social media algorithms are doing the influencing of what things people consume by telling them what's "in" and what they need to be buying to be cool and desirable. What is also happening is what I would like to call 'ironic consumerism,' engaging in trends and what is currently the big new product to buy but doing it in a detached, ironic meme-fied way. However, in their attempt to criticize and mock consumerism, they

play right into it. Since the introduction of social media as a key aspect of our lives and culture, it is close to impossible to separate yourself from this toxic cycle. When I say 'separating yourself' I do not mean not buying anything, but rather being conscious of what is happening and how you are being exploited.

I believe that people can move past hyper-consumption from capitalism and shop for themselves independently and consciously. If you want to escape the cycle of consumerism, think to yourself "do I need the current trending item?" Or "do I need to buy hundreds of action figures to prove that I'm a real fan of the video game or anime that I like?" Your iden-



tity should be built on who you are and what you enjoy, not on what you purchase; and your consumption should be based on who you are as a person, not the other way around. Also, the cycle of consumerism is horrible for the environment since many of those items end up in landfills. For example, 30 million dollars worth of Funko Pops were dumped into landfills which are profoundly bad for the environment. The message I want to send in this writing is live for your own pleasure and not for what social media tells you to do. You do not need the trending new item to be a valuable person and you do not need to collect as many action figures and collectibles as possible to prove you are a real fan of whatever media fran-

chise you enjoy. It's important that we believe that there is a possibility for a post-consumerist world, it will simply take some work to get there. You can start by working on your own consumption habits, remembering what you value as a person when you purchase things, and making sure that you find value in what you are doing with said goods. For example, if you are a diehard collector, you may find passion and value in having an old collectible that you want to preserve for the sake of history and to possibly pass down to your kids someday. There is value in that because it goes beyond simply owning a collectible or having that thing. I like to think of the things that I buy as something I have a relationship with. If you do not feel like you have some sort of attachment to the item, even if it is a small attachment, then there might not be much worth in you buying it, and you might want to think deeper into your decision. Because social media focuses on things for around a month before they are forgotten, people do not have that level of attachment. People buy it either because they see other influencers wearing it or in this ironic, meme-fied way and then they either throw it away to rot in a landfill, or it collects dust on a shelf or in a basement. One way to prevent the things you buy from going to waste is, again, to feel like you have some level of attachment to what you own. Not only is this good for preventing this cycle, but it also is good for people to have things that they personally cherish and love.

MATCHA COURTESY OF FOODBYJONISTER.COM & LABUBU COURTESY OF STOCKX

COLLEGE STUDENTS PASSIONATE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH SHOULD PLAY 'MISSED MESSAGES.'

by Bonnibel Lilith Rampertab
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Content warning for suicide, self-harm and mental illness.

There's an overwhelming number of games to spend time playing even only in the free games section of popular gaming platform Steam. A lot of these freeware games happen to be low quality for a variety of potential reasons, but sometimes you can find a game of value. Visual novel "missed messages." by Angela He is one such gem in the rough. Within its simple, misleading storytelling touching on themes of peer emotional support in crisis and grief, this game is one of the best visual novels in general and one many college students should be aware of.

Of course, here's a necessary spoiler warning if you would rather play or watch the game first before reading this article. The game itself warns the audience before playing about the themes of self-harm and suicide as content warnings, which could bring up trauma. This article will be no different to digest

the contents. Let's talk about the medium of the story before the synopsis. Visual novels are marketed as video games but fundamentally require a certain amount of reading, critical thinking and option selection, all varying to convey the message they want you to get. Although they get a bad reputation for a multitude of reasons like being too sexual, not every visual novel is the same, like how not all movies are the same. The scene is set at the beginning of the game with a college student, August, doing her homework in her dorm. August's roommate, May, could later be heard arguing with her parents nearby. August suddenly gets an AirDrop from someone with the phone name "goth gf's iPhone" with a meme attached. You have the option of continuing the study session, taking a break from your computer or talking to this fellow student. If you choose to continue talking to the goth girl, there's an option to flirt with her by sending images back and forth to each other complimenting how the goth girl's makeup looks. She then invites you to spend time with her in person.

Before leaving, May asks if August is heading out and sings to her for August's birthday, ultimately telling her she's grateful they're friends. The goth girl's name is revealed to be Amy. They spend time together talking about relatively superfluous topics, before being interrupted by some frightening messages from May. She was saying that she was scared and reminded August how the two were such good friends. August turned off her phone when hanging out with Amy, so she didn't see those messages. Getting back to her dorm, August finds a note which tells her to call the police and to not open the door. You have the option of opening the door anyway, which leads to you finding May's corpse. As she mourns and processes what happens, August recalls the shallow and ephemeral pity others had for May, but August can't forget that someone she loved and cared for killed herself. If not for the content warnings, this would have come as a complete shock to most of the audience. The element of surprise, regardless of medium,

is extremely cruel when something negative happens. But that's life unfortunately. After the first few playthroughs, it becomes more apparent that Amy is a red herring who distracts you from spending time with May, who desperately needs someone to talk to. It may seem impossible to get the game to have August talk with May about her mental health through the game's design, but it is possible according to the amount of ending achievements available. Looking online for a guide to get 100% of the achievements leads to different endings where May and August talk about what's been going on. You never know what someone else is going through, but even a little conversation can go a long way. Of course, it's easier to see the signs in controlled media; it's hard not to think you could have done more in retrospect when faced with the harsh reality of losing someone you loved or learning that they're in pain, promoting survivor's guilt. It's difficult to notice the warning signs ahead of time. This game helps present what it's like to live with that guilt. Mental illness is increasingly common in college students and

beyond. It's considered by professionals a crisis in Gen Z. This is why emotional and psychological consciousness is integral for everyone you interact with whether you realize your power or not. You never know if even the simple act of listening could help someone struggling with mental illness. In a culture that promotes apathy and stigmatization over listening to each other open-mindedly, it's the least we can do. "missed messages." could be an uncomfortable game for some with how it deals with suicide in such an upfront way, but it conveys an important story on the topic told in a unique way that many college students, especially those not conscious of mental health, need to hear. There are real people out there who struggle with aspects of suicide whether personally or within the people they care about who need all the support they could get. Learning about mental health literacy as a peer can affirm life and help heal universally. To Angela He: thank you for making art available for free that puts words to the effects of such an alarming phenomenon, helping people process and build a dialogue about it.

Opinion

Photo of the Day | Walkin' and talkin'



UConn students enjoy a sunny morning in Storrs, Conn. on Sept. 29, 2025. The leaves have begun to change as fall has officially arrived.
 PHOTO BY SYDNEY CHANDLER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

COMIC



BY SAM HASS
 ARTIST EDITOR

RAPID FIRE

If we're lucky in the Opinion section, we work through our beliefs completely and support them with great arguments. But sometimes, we don't need a deeper reason or great explanation to hold our convictions. Rapid Fire is for those short takes that can be explained in just a few sentences — no more justification needed.

The Opinion Section likes to joke around sometimes, what's so wrong with that? And there's been no set of jokes in recent months as funny as a certain set of numbers that need no explanation. Yet, those two infamous digits are hardly the only funny number out there. So, in today's Rapid Fire, the Opinion Section will give their answers to the question: What do you think the funniest number is?

TOMAS HINCKLEY
 OPINION EDITOR

I have nothing to contribute to this question, I just want the record to show that I was absent from work the day we decided to publish this. Let my name not be stained by this silliness.

TAMARA SEGAL
 CONTRIBUTOR

While they're not exactly one number, I think the triplets "7-8-9," the stars of the seven-ate-nine joke, are most deserving of this honor because of their sheer timelessness. Many numbers that are considered funny nowadays have no rhyme or reason, and they only serve a specific population or generation. While I appreciate a good nonsensical laugh, there's something special about a joke anyone can get behind. I mean, try explaining 67 to your grandma. But 7-8-9 is always there for you. I think even Shakespeare would have laughed, and that's beautiful.

PATRICK MINNERLY
 ASSOCIATE OPINION EDITOR

I'm going a little out of the box here, but I consider the googolplex to be the funniest number, simply because it has the silliest name. I can get behind a million. I can get behind a billion. Even trillions and quadrillions don't faze me. But the name of the googolplex just makes me laugh. Also, it can't be physically written out without using scientific notation, and there's something ironically funny about a number you can hardly quantify.

COLIN HAMILTON
 CONTRIBUTOR

Funny numbers come, and funny numbers go, but few have stayed lodged in our cultural memory like 5,318,008. Over the decades, it has consistently

delivered the same cheap laugh. Simply punch it into a calculator, flip it over, and there it is: pure, unfiltered potty humor. Generations of kids have discovered this joke, sniggering in their math classes as they pass the joke down like a rite of passage. Even today, in the age of internet memes and fast-lived gags, 5,318,008 stands tall as the original "funny number." For that, it deserves the crown.

BONNIBEL LILITH RAMPERTAB
 CONTRIBUTOR

What's 9 plus 10? You'd be a fool to say it's 19. It's actually 21. There were rumors of that kid dying in the news, but that's fake (so far). He lives in our collective unconscious regardless. I see him in my dreams. I hope the kid turned young adult at this point is doing well. Honorable mention: fans of the video game remixing channel on YouTube SiIvaGunner will remember that during "King for Another Day 2" there was a certain funny number on the Jazz Cats' stage: 7. Grand dad? "Flintstones?" The Internet was never the same again.

BRAYDEN'S BREAKDOWN: PREVIEWING THE RED SOX VERSUS YANKEES WILDCARD MATCHUP

by **Brayden Gorski**
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For the third time since 2018, the best rivalry in baseball takes center stage in the postseason.

The Boston Red Sox will head to Yankee Stadium for a three-game series with the New York Yankees. Games will be played at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday and if necessary, Thursday.

The Red Sox have won the last three postseason series against the Yankees dating back to the miraculous 3-0 comeback in 2004. Boston beat New York 3-1 in the 2018 ALDS and took home the final one game wildcard against the Yankees in 2021.

This season, the Red Sox won the series 9-4 in the regular season, including eight straight victories against their archrival.

Both sides have announced a starting pitcher for game 1 with Garrett Crochet on the mound for Boston and Max Fried toeing the rubber for New York.

Crochet had the best season of his young career and will finish in the top three for Cy Young voting. The southpaw went 18-5 with a 2.59 ERA while leading the league in strikeouts and innings pitched. Crochet pitched against the Yankees four times this season, all resulting in wins for the Red Sox. His best perfor-

mance came on June 13 when he went 8.1 shutout innings before surrendering a home run to Aaron Judge. The Sox would hit a walk of winner in extras. The 26-year-old Crochet also pitched 7 innings of 1 run ball against the Bronx Bombers at the end of August. He struck out 11 Yankees that day.

The former Chicago White Sock appeared out of the bullpen for Chicago during their postseason runs in the early 2020s. He pitched a total of three innings, allowing 0 hits and striking out 6. The Red Sox front office signed him to a six-year \$170 million dollar contract extension for games like this, all eyes will be on the Sox ace Tuesday night.

Fried was stellar in his first year of an eight-year \$218 million dollar contract with New York. Fried led the league in wins while striking out a career high 189 batters. The lefty had three starts against Boston this year and two of which saw his team go scoreless at the hands of Boston. On August 22, he and Red Sox game 2 starter Bryan Bello dueled with Fried being pulled after 99 pitches and 6 innings of work. The Yankees bullpen instantly allowed the lone run of the game and that was that. The 31-year-old has been roughed up in his last three postseason starts but was pivotal for the 2021 World Series Champion

Atlanta Braves. Despite getting tagged for over five earned runs in starts against the Dodgers and Astros respectively, Fried had three starts where he allowed 2 or less runs including six innings of shoutout baseball in the Braves World Series clinching game 6 victory.

If Fried can see some run support, it is anyone's game on Tuesday.

The x-factors for Boston against Fried and other lefties are Romy Gonzalez and Rob Refsnyder. Refsnyder hit .302 with 7 home runs against left-handed pitchers this season. The veteran will be in the lineup against Fried on Tuesday and could be pivotal down the stretch.

Gonzalez has been locked in all summer and is looking to continue his momentum into October. The infielder finished the season with a .305 batting average which included a 14-game hitting streak during the month of September. He has also become an everyday member of the lineup, hitting .286 versus righties in almost 200 plate appearances this season.

Carlos Rodon will be on the mound for Aaron Boone's team in game 2 opposing Bello for the Sox. Rodon had his best season in New York going 18-9 and earning his first All-Star nod since 2022. He will also see the likes of Gonzalez and Refsnyder

in Alex Cora's lefty lineup on Wednesday night.

Bello had his best season in the big leagues by far, posting a 3.35 ERA in 29 games. The righty struggled in his last start against the Bronx Bombers but was dominant in his first two. Bello went 14 scoreless innings in those two starts with the Red Sox winning both. If he can get back to his old ways and brush off his 5.40 ERA in the month of September, the Sox have a fighting chance in game 2.

Starpower will be on display in both batting orders. The Bronx Bombers lived up to the name as they had seven players hit over 20 home runs. Judge led the way with 53 while Trent Grisham put up an impressive 34 along with great defense in centerfield. Giancarlo Stanton hit 24 in only 77 games and was on fire last playoffs, the Yankees will look for him to carry that momentum into this October.

The Red Sox will rely heavily on the veteran tandem of Alex Bregman and Trevor Story. Bregman was named an All-Star in his first season in Boston after accumulating 3.5 WAR. Story finally had a fully healthy season for the Sox and produced similar numbers to his days in Colorado. The shortstop hit 25 home runs and stole 31 bases in 157 games played.

These two along with 2023 World Series Champion Na-

thaniel Lowe have the most postseason experience in the lineup and will be crucial if the Sox want to make it out of the Bronx victorious.

Other important hitters include Jarren Duran, former Yankee Carlos Narvaez and clutch specialist Ceddanne Rafaela whose walk off triple on Friday night sent the Red Sox to the playoffs.

The bullpens for each team have had their ups and downs this season, but both seem to be ready to roll into October.

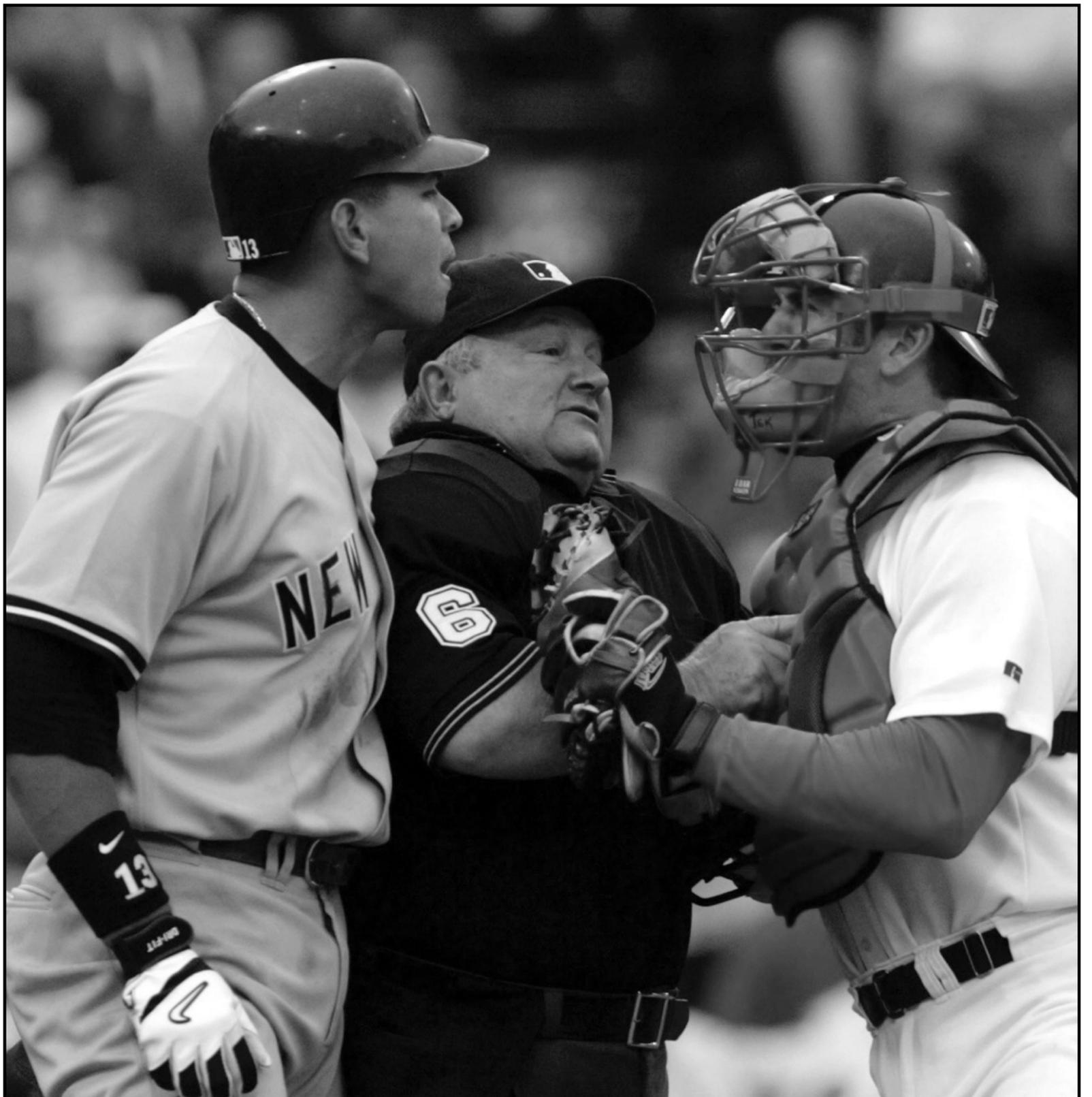
The Boston backend of Garrett Whitlock and Aroldis Chapman have been dominant, with Chapman having his best season ever converting 32 of 34 save opportunities.

Devin Williams had a very rocky season but really started to turn a corner for the Yankees in September. After surrendering 4 runs on September 3, Williams has only allowed 5 hits and 2 walks in his last nine appearances out of the pen.

The heavyweight clash is set for this week and fans from both sides are eager to see the chaos unfold.



LOGO BY SAMANTHA HASS, ARTIST EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS



Rivalry is fierce between the Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees. The two teams will play against each other in a three-game series beginning this week. PHOTO COURTESY OF @NYHISTORY ON INSTAGRAM

Sports

Photo of the Day | Women's hockey

University of Connecticut women's ice hockey took on St. Cloud State at the Toscano Family Ice Forum on Sept. 26, 2025. Despite a lead in the first period, the Huskies fell 2-1.

PHOTOGRAPH BY EMMA MEIDINGER, ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS



JOSE ALTUVE: IS A FRANCHISE ICON FALTERING?

by Thaddeus Sawyer

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After being a powerhouse in the American League West for the better part of a decade, the Houston Astros missed the playoffs in 2025 for the first time since 2016. Now, three years removed from their last World Series championship, their current roster looks much different than it did just a few seasons earlier.

Alex Bregman departed last offseason via free agency to join the Boston Red Sox. Kyle Tucker was flipped to the Cubs when it became clear that a Houston extension was unlikely. Short-stop Jeremy Peña and designated hitter Yordan Alvarez both missed significant time in 2025 due to injury. Staff ace Framber Valdez will almost certainly depart in free agency this upcoming offseason. He'll follow in the tracks of future Hall of Famer Justin Verlander, who left after 2024. Even manager Dusty Baker is gone, retiring after the 2023 season. The sole key member left from that 2022 season to see significant playing time in 2025 was second baseman Jose Altuve.

The greatest player in franchise history, Altuve has long been synonymous with the Astros' success as well as their controversies. The 15 season MLB veteran has long been considered one of the best players in the game, winning the AL MVP in 2017 and being named to nine all-star games. The seven-time Silver Slugger has a career post-season slash line of .271/.337/.505 and an OPS of .841, winning the AL Championship Series MVP in 2019.

At the same time, that success has come under scrutiny due to his alleged involvement in the 2017 Astros sign stealing scandal and the 2019 buzzer accusations from the 2020 offseason. While multiple teammates have said that Altuve was one of only a few Astros players openly opposed to the 2017 system and the 2019 accusations are just that, much of Altuve's success will always remain tainted for some. There's a possibility that these purported transgressions will be the only factors that derail his eventual Hall of Fame candidacy.

No matter how you view the peak of Altuve's career, his production seems to be on the downturn. The 2025 season marked the worst full season of his career since his age 23 season in 2013. He accumulated just 0.5 WAR and was essentially a replacement level player. His .265 batting average was down 35 points from 2024 and his on

base percentage also dropped by 21 points. Both his OPS and OPS+ have fallen in each of the last three seasons. Despite this decline, Altuve was still able to accumulate 2.3 offensive due to the majority of his numbers remaining above average.

It was on defense where Altuve hurt the team most. Despite winning a Gold Glove in 2015, the 35-year-old has never been considered a good defender by most metrics. In 2025, however, he was one of the worst defenders in all of baseball. According to the Fielding Bible, Altuve was worth --18 defensive runs saved, the third worst mark in the league. His work at second base came in as the seventh worst in the league, worth -7 DRS. The 2025 season marked the first time that the Astros attempted to move Altuve off second base, trying him for 47 games in left field. He was even worse on the grass, being worth -10 DRS and ranking as the league's worst left fielder despite not even playing a third of a season's worth of games at the position. That showing was what prompted Houston to move him back to the keystone midseason. Overall, Altuve was worth -2.2 defensive WAR.

That exceptionally poor defensive showing led to Altuve being penciled in as the designated hitter in 49 contests, easily a career high mark. While that arrangement helped to get his bat in the lineup while avoiding his negative defense, it isn't a viable long-term solution for the Astros lineup as it is currently situated. Yordan Alvarez played just 48 games for the Astros in 2025 but is one of the best pure hitters in MLB. In 2024, Alvarez put up a .959 OPS with 35 home runs, good for a 5.9 oWAR. The only downside was that he too is an extremely poor defender in left field, being worth -1.6 dWAR over 53 games in left.

The Crawford Boxes at Dai-kin Park make left field in Houston significantly smaller than right, meaning a switch to the other side stands unlikely to benefit either player. Yordan Alvarez has played over 300 more games than Altuve at the DH position, despite playing half as long. With Alvarez finishing the season on the injured list with a severe sprained ankle, it's likely that Houston would rather keep him at DH to prevent further lower body injuries.

That leaves Altuve likely to return to second base full time in 2026. There are signs in his 2025 underlying numbers that suggest a turnaround offensively is at least possible. He posted a batting average on balls in play over 40 points lower than his career average. His strikeout

rate went down compared to the last two seasons, while his walk rate went up. His home run rate was also up, and his 26 home runs were his most since 2022.

There is hope that Altuve could at least get back to his 2024 all-star level. However, that kind of bounce back is

far from guaranteed. His 2025 production won't be enough to outweigh his negative defensive production over a full season. Using Spotrac's estimation of the Astros' 2025 payroll, Altuve's \$30 million contract took up just over 14% of the 2025 number. Altuve stands to make

the same amount next season, and the Astros will need him to play to that level if they hope to make it back to the postseason in 2026.



Jose Altuve batting for the Houston Astros. With a recent decline in his performance, Astros fans hold out hope for an improved 2026 season. PHOTO COURTESY OF @MLB ON INSTAGRAM

PRESS BOX PROFILES: INSIDE THE INDUSTRY WITH JEFF CALHOUN

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In sports broadcasting, a spotter plays a pivotal role in helping broadcasters sound sharp, deliver real-time information and add depth to the action. For the last eight years, Jeff Calhoun has been that behind-the-scenes presence, spotting for ESPN crews and making sure voices like Joe Tessitore's have what they need in the booth.

Calhoun's love for sports was instilled early. His father, Jim Calhoun, built a Hall of Fame career on the sidelines as a college basketball coach, spending decades at Northeastern and later UConn. Growing up in that environment, Jeff was surrounded by the game. He played in every camp he could, spent hours in gyms.

His father never pushed him into sports. However, he relayed one message: When you commit to doing this, to being involved in something or trying to be the best at something, you do it with everything you have. That mindset carried Jeff through his playing days at UConn and later into his unexpected career in broadcasting.

In 1992, Calhoun started attending the University of Connecticut and eventually earned a spot on their basketball team, under his father.

"In high school it's light, it's easy, it's playing with your friends. In college it takes on a lot more pressure, a lot more seriousness," Calhoun said. "It's still fun, just a different kind of fun."

Throughout his time at UConn, Calhoun dealt with a string

of injuries that repeatedly set him back. The constant setbacks shaped his experience as a college athlete and forced him to see the game from a different perspective.

In 1996, Calhoun graduated from UConn. While his playing days were behind him, he wanted to stay involved in sports and was presented with multiple options. He was offered a couple of grad assistant coaching roles but turned those down. Instead, he shifted to insurance.

"I've always had some semblance of staying attached to the industry, I did a lot," Calhoun said. "I worked with a lot of professional athletes on the insurance side for a long time."

He also got involved in private aviation.

Eventually, he befriended Jason Benetti, at the time a broadcaster at ESPN, and Benetti asked Calhoun to spot for him. "He asked me if I would spot for him in football," Calhoun said. "I didn't know what it meant, but I said yes. And he taught me how to do it."

Coincidentally, the first game he ever spotted was a football game between UConn and Virginia, on Sept. 16, 2017.

Since then, he's never looked back.

Benetti also called college basketball, which Calhoun was also there for. This helped him foster a good reputation in spotting and build more connections.

When the pandemic hit in 2020, travel looked different across the industry. Most broadcasters stayed home, but spotters were still on the road to provide eyes and information from the booth. Around that time, Joe Tessitore returned to college

football after a stint calling the NFL on ESPN.

Tessitore, who Calhoun had known since his days covering UConn for Channel 3 in Hartford, asked him to spot. That opportunity opened the door to bigger assignments.

In his time with Tessitore, ESPN acquired the rights to broadcast SEC football and has grown its College Football Playoff coverage. This has led to Calhoun experiencing crazy environments and games.

"Michigan versus Alabama in the Rose Bowl two years ago was a great game. Ohio State vs Georgia in the Peach Bowl, a few years ago with CJ Stroud was a great game," Calhoun said. "I did the Red River shootout. That was so fun. I've done the White-out game at Penn State. I've done some big games."

This past year, the SEC on ABC won an Emmy. Since Calhoun is a part of their crew, he received one of the trophies.

"I think the pressure of [spotting is my favorite part]. You got to get it right. If I get it wrong, nobody knows that I've got it wrong. I just make Joe look bad," Calhoun said. "I like the teamwork. I like the fact that during the game, there's like kind of nothing else that you can think about. You're just so locked in because you have to be. At the end of the day, I go to some of the best college football games in the country."

On top of that, in 2022, Benetti also made the jump to calling six NFL games per year, also exposing Calhoun to the league.

In the process, Calhoun has gotten to see the work put into a TV broadcast first-hand.

"I don't think I ever appreci-

ated certain things before I got into this," Calhoun said. "Kind of all that goes into a TV broadcast, you know, how much teamwork it takes and how much prep and work. It's a lot of people kind of working together to get that game on the air."

While still being very successful in aviation and insurance, Calhoun describes spotting as a side hustle, but he's made his mark in the role and built a repu-

tation for reliability on some of ESPN's biggest stages. In many ways, he's lived out his father's message from years ago, if you commit to something, you give it everything you have.

"This is a total side gig," Calhoun said. "I do a lot of it: college football, about six NFL games a year on FOX with Jason, the UFL in the spring on ESPN. It adds up, but at the end of the day it's just a fun side job for me."



Jeff Calhoun and his father, Jim Calhoun pose for a photo. Jeff graduated UConn in 1996, playing basketball under his father Jim. PHOTO COURTESY OF @JEFCALHOUN ON X

THE HONOR ROLL: OREGON RISES TO NO. 2 AFTER HUGE WIN AT PENN STATE



Oregon celebrates after winning their football game against Penn State. Oregon's next game is scheduled for Oct. 11 against Indiana. PHOTO COURTESY OF @OREGONFOOTBALL ON INSTAGRAM

by **Sam Calhoun**
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The final Saturday of September was one to remember. Along with the final days of the MLB regular season and the Ryder Cup, college football had a loaded schedule. Teams that dropped out include Mississippi State, USC and TCU.

Ohio State (5-0, 1-0 Big Ten) remains No. 1 after a 24-6 win over Washington. The Buckeyes head back home to host Minnesota (3-1, 1-0 Big Ten) on Saturday at 7:30 p.m. on NBC and streaming on Peacock.

Oregon (5-0, 2-0 Big Ten) shot up to No. 2 after a gigantic dou-

ble-overtime win at Penn State. The Ducks will take a week off before playing No. 10 Indiana (5-0, 2-0 Big Ten) on Oct. 11 at 3:30 p.m. on CBS.

Miami (Fla.) (4-0) held on to its No. 3 spot after having the week off before opening ACC play against No. 9 Florida State (3-0) on Saturday at 7:30 p.m. on ABC.

Ole Miss (5-0, 3-0 SEC) moves up to No. 4 as the highest-ranked SEC team. Trinidad Chambliss' 385 scrimmage yards helped the Rebels upset LSU, 24-19. They will take a week off before hosting Washington State (3-2) on Oct. 11 at 12:45 p.m. on SEC Network.

Texas A&M (4-0, 1-0 SEC) slides up to No. 5 following a 16-

10 win over Auburn, thanks to the Aggies' defense. Next on the agenda will be Mississippi State (4-1, 0-1 SEC) on Saturday at 7:30 p.m. on SEC Network.

Texas (3-1) is now No. 6 despite being idle this past week. The Longhorns open SEC play at Florida (1-3, 0-1 SEC) on Saturday at 3:30 p.m. on ESPN.

Oklahoma (4-0, 1-0 SEC), like Texas, was idle but moved up one spot and is now ranked No. 7 in my list. The Sooners are back in action against Kent State (1-3, 0-1 MAC) on Saturday at 4 p.m. on SEC Network.

Penn State (3-1, 0-1 Big Ten) dropped to No. 8 after a heart-breaking Big Ten-opening loss to Oregon in front of 111,015 fans wearing white. The Nittany Li-

ons look to redeem themselves at UCLA (0-4, 0-1 Big Ten) on Saturday at 3:30 p.m. on CBS.

Alabama (3-1, 1-0 SEC) soared to No. 9 after a huge SEC-opening win at Georgia on Saturday night. The Crimson Tide never trailed against the Bulldogs. College GameDay is coming to Tuscaloosa for Alabama's battle against No. 22 Vanderbilt (5-0, 1-0 SEC) on Saturday at 3:30 p.m. on ABC.

Indiana (5-0, 2-0 Big Ten) rounds out the top 10 after a huge 20-15 win at Iowa on Saturday. Quarterback Fernando Mendoza has put himself in contention for Big Ten Player of the Year. The Hoosiers are on bye this week and will face No. 2 Oregon (5-0, 2-0 Big Ten) on Oct. 11 at 3:30 p.m. on CBS.

Georgia (3-1, 1-1 SEC) dropped to No. 11 after a home loss to Alabama, where they never took the lead. The Bulldogs look for redemption at home against Kentucky (2-2, 0-2 SEC) on Saturday at noon on ABC.

Iowa State (4-0, 1-0 Big 12) stayed at No. 12 after dominating Arizona, 39-14. The Cyclones visit Cincinnati (3-1, 1-0 Big 12) on Saturday at noon on ESPN2.

Texas Tech (4-0, 1-0 Big 12) dropped to No. 13 after having the week off. They visit Houston (4-0, 1-0 Big 12) on Saturday at 7 p.m. on ESPN.

LSU (4-1, 1-1 SEC) fell to No. 14 following a Magnolia Bowl loss to Ole Miss, 24-19. The Tigers will take the week off before hosting South Carolina (3-2, 1-2 SEC) on Oct. 11 at 7:30/7:45 p.m. on either ESPN/ABC/SEC Network.

Michigan (3-1, 1-0 Big Ten) is now No. 15 coming off a bye week. The Wolverines host Wisconsin (2-2, 0-1 Big Ten) on Saturday at noon on FOX.

Illinois (4-1, 1-1 Big Ten) improved to No. 16 after a thrilling 34-32 win over USC on Saturday. The Fighting Illini visit Purdue (2-2, 0-1 Big Ten) on Saturday at noon on Big Ten Network.

Tennessee (4-1, 1-1 SEC) slid up to No. 17 after rallying to beat Mississippi State in overtime, 41-34. The Volunteers will take the week off to prepare for Arkansas (2-3, 0-1 SEC) on Oct. 11 at 4:15 p.m. on SEC Network.

Georgia Tech (5-0, 2-0 ACC) became the second-best ACC team at No. 18 following a 30-29 overtime win over Wake Forest. The Yellow Jackets host Virginia Tech (2-3, 1-0 ACC) on Oct. 11 at 3:30 p.m. on ACC Network.

Florida State (3-1, 0-1 ACC) plummeted to No. 19 following a 36-38 double-overtime loss at Virginia on Friday night. The Seminoles host No. 3 Miami (Fla.) (4-0) on Saturday at 7:30 p.m. on ABC.

BYU (4-0, 1-0 Big 12) re-enters the ranking at No. 20 following a 24-21 win at Colorado. The Cougars host West Virginia (2-3, 0-2 Big 12) on Friday at 10:30 p.m. on ESPN.

South Florida (3-1) remains at No. 21 after having the week off. The Bulls open conference play with Charlotte (1-3, 0-1 American) on Friday at 7 p.m. on ESPN2.

Vanderbilt (4-0, 1-0 SEC) remains at No. 22 after blowing Utah State out, 55-35. The Commodores visit No. 9 Alabama (3-1, 1-0 SEC) on Saturday at 3:30 p.m. on ABC.

Missouri (5-0, 1-0 SEC) is now No. 23 after a 42-6 easy win over UMass. They have the week off before hosting No. 9 Alabama (3-1, 1-0 SEC) on Oct. 11 at noon on ABC.

Arizona State (4-1, 2-0 Big 12) re-enters the ranking at No. 24 following a 27-24 upset win over TCU on Friday night. The Sun Devils visit Utah (4-1, 1-1 Big 12) on Oct. 11 at 10:15 p.m. on ESPN.

Virginia (4-1, 2-0 ACC) makes its debut in my ranking at No. 25 following a thrilling double-overtime win over Florida State. The Cavaliers visit Louisville (4-0, 1-0 ACC) on Saturday at 3:30 p.m. on ESPN2.



Sports

BOSTON BASEBALL – THE MOVIE SCRIPT LIVES ON

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This Boston Red Sox season has felt like less of a baseball schedule and more of a movie. Marked by dramatic highs and some frustrating lows, the Sox have defied the odds and battled their way into October, where they will prepare for the wild-card game against their rivals, the New York Yankees.

A season that started with high expectations — fueled by major offseason additions and the buzz of exciting new players carried a heavy weight of pressure for this year's Red Sox team to succeed. From the moment that players touched down in Fort Myers for spring training, there was a different feel than in years prior. There was hope and expectation of success for management that hadn't been present in the last few years.

The season started off with the lineup having a lot of questions, after the Red Sox splurged big for the first time in a while, going out and getting three big names. Star pitcher Garret Crochet was brought in to anchor a rotation that needed a bulldog that was capable of starting the big games. To strengthen the bullpen, the Red Sox took a risk on veteran Ar-

oldis Chapman to give them a true closer. They also agreed to a deal with third baseman Alex Bregman, who had close ties to manager Alex Cora. The move was seen to boost a lineup that had struggled the year prior, but it sparked controversy in the clubhouse. Star third baseman and long-tenured Red Sox Rafael Devers was frustrated by the acquisition, and what followed was a saga between him and general manager Craig Breslow. The tension between the two added another storyline to a season that was already filled with drama.

The drama would start with Devers, but there was way more than just that. Early in the year, the Sox would lose power-hitting first baseman Tristan Casas, who was looking for a bounce-back season after struggling the year prior. Boston would mask his absence with Abraham Toro and Romy Gonzales before signing Nate Lowe just weeks ago off waivers to play first base full-time. The team would also notably lose their number two pitcher in Tanner Houck, for the year after he started off very slowly. Masataka Yoshida was also out for half the season as he battled a back injury that prevented him from playing.

The Devers drama tension would plague the Red Sox lead-

ing to the clubhouse's dynamics being off for the start of the season. Craig Breslow began looking for trade offers to ship the star third baseman away. He did all this without the media knowing, and when the news dropped, that Devers was traded to the Giants, the fan base was shocked and disgruntled, but it couldn't have been a better decision. The Red Sox would receive two notable pieces back in Kyle Harrison, who has started a few games down the stretch, and assets that turned out to be Dustin May, who is not out for the year. They might not have gotten more talented, but it allowed them to start fresh and play their youth waiting in AAA.

That youth would be a key to this year as the big three prospects in Roman Anthony, Kristan Campbell and Marcelo Mayer gave a lot of hope for the franchise's future. Campbell would start the season on the big-league roster and start out hot in April, but he cooled down fast, and this caused Breslow to send him back down. Mayer was then called up and provided steady defense and a solid bat in his limited action before hurting his wrist in the middle of the year. Roman Anthony was everything that the Red Sox envisioned as he became a focal point of the offense after being

called up. The power from the lefty was a big factor and freed up a spot in the lineup as he also played the outfield, opposed to Devers, who was a below-average defender. However, just when he was at his highest, everything came crashing down as at the start of September, Anthony went down with a back injury that could sideline him for the rest of the year. Notably, Boston has also called up top pitching prospects Connelly Early and Payton Tolle to provide depth following injuries. Both have been decent; however, Early has truly shone as he has tossed a few solid starts in the last month of the season.

The prospects definitely added to the depth of the roster; however, there were still major questions about Red Sox veterans before the season, and most of them answered the call. Trevor Story was labeled as a bust signing as he has battled injuries in his tenure with the Sox; however, with a full bill of health, he was looking for a bounce-back year. The same would hold true for Cedanne Rafaela, who is arguably the best defender in baseball although he could not get the bat going to start his pro career. Finally, Bryan Bello, who has been in the Red Sox rotation for years and has struggled to find consistency, was truly looking to develop into a

reliable arm to help out the rotation. Story would prove to be one of the best stories in baseball this year, along with Rafaela, as both found their bats and kept playing superb defense. Story would finish the regular season hitting .263 with 25 HR and 96 RBIs in the middle of the Sox lineup. For Rafaela, his stats would not light up the box as he hit .249 on the year with 13 HR and 63 RBIs; however, he provided some of the top moments of the year. Notably, the short-stop provided a walk off to beat the Rays at home earlier in the year, and just most recently, he sent the Red Sox to the playoffs with a shot to the wall versus the Tigers.

Ultimately, the Red Sox season has been defined as turbulence and triumph. A roster with high expectations that was shaped by in-season and offseason moves, tested by clubhouse tensions and that relied on its prospects to help them stay afloat. The departure of Devers was unthinkable at the time, but it allowed the chance for the youngsters to shine. With a team that looked fragile on paper at times, the Red Sox proved resilient and battled their way into the postseason, where they will again write another chapter in a storied legacy against the New York Yankees.

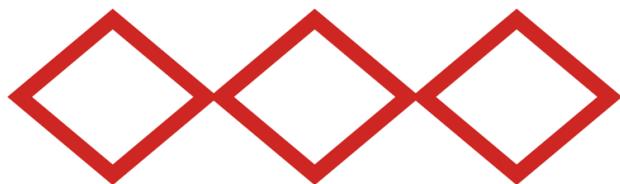
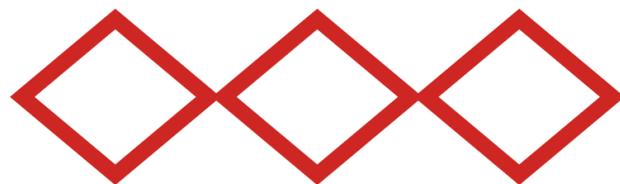


ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF CREAZILLA



Roman Anthony running during a game. Anthony is an outfielder for the Boston Red Sox. PHOTO COURTESY OF @ROMANNANTHONY ON INSTAGRAM