

SPORTS



«AND NOW, ON TO CANADA»
The U.S. men's national soccer team is still scrapping to qualify for the World Cup. B6

AN ALL-STAR MOCKERY?
Writer pans selection process to determine starters for the NBA All-Star Game. B3

INSIDE

AGE QUESTION POPS UP IN FIGURE SKATING

Not the best event for 20-somethings?



KAREN CHEN

MARIAH BELL

TUNE IN

WINTER OLYMPICS
Feb. 4-20 in Beijing (NBC)

KAMILA VALIEVA

ALYSA LIU

PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BY DAVE SKRETTA
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tara Lipinski was a sprightly 15-year-old ballerina-on-ice when she won figure skating gold at the 1998 Nagano Olympics.

Sarah Hughes was but a year older when she did the same thing four years later in the Salt Lake City Games.

In fact, six of the past seven Olympic champions in women's figure skating were old enough to dangle a gold medal around their neck but unable to buy a celebratory bottle of champagne—at least in the U.S. That includes reigning champion Alina Zagitova, who had yet to turn 16 when she stood on the top step of the podium in Pyeongchang.

It all raises an age-old question in figure skating: How old is too old?

Of the three American women competing at the Beijing Games next week, 25-year-old Mariah Bell and 22-year-old Karen Chen are older than every gold medalist since 1932 save one: Japan's Shizuka Arakawa, who had just turned 24 before the 2006 Turin Games. In fact, Bell and Chen are older than all three medalists from the 2018 Games.

"I remember the first

time someone asked me what it felt like to be a veteran and I was so shocked," said Chen, who was 11th as an 18-year-old in Pyeongchang. "In my mind, I'm young. I'm a 15-year-old. But I'm definitely not. I'm 22."

If that makes Chen old by figure skating standards, her teammate is positively ancient. After barely missing out on the Olympic team four years ago, Bell continued to skate in the face of all the naysayers that tried to call her over the hill. It didn't matter that the crowd favorite would be a full decade older than Lipinski or Zagitova when they won their Olympic gold medals,

only that she still had the inner passion of a teenager.

Bell was rewarded for sticking with it, too. She won her first national championship in her ninth try earlier this month in Nashville, becoming the oldest U.S. skater to win the women's title in 95 years.

"It's ridiculous that it's been that long," Bell said, "but you know what? Age is literally a number. It means nothing. And if you have a dream, there is no limit to the time you have to achieve that dream."

That all sounds great in a self-help book. But the reality is that when it comes to figure skating, much like gymnastics in the Summer Olympics, age usually does matter.

SEE SKATING, B5



ANDY BROWNBILL / ASSOCIATED PRESS

After defeating Matteo Berrettini on Friday, Rafael Nadal (above) is a win away from his 21st major title.

TENNIS

Much at stake for Nadal, Medvedev

BOTH AUSTRALIAN OPEN FINALISTS CAN ACHIEVE GOALS WITH A VICTORY

BY JOHN PYE
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MELBOURNE, Australia—Rafael Nadal is within one victory of a men's record 21st Grand Slam singles title.

He'll have to beat second-seeded Daniil Medvedev in the Australian Open final on Sunday to make history. And Medvedev is chasing a piece of history of his own after beating Stefanos Tsitsipas 7-6 (5), 4-6, 6-4, 6-1 in a heated semifinal on Friday. The U.S. Open champion is aiming to be the first man in the Open era to win his second Grand Slam title at the next major tournament.

Nadal advanced to the final in Australia for the

TUNE IN

AUSTRALIAN OPEN
Men's singles final

Daniil Medvedev vs. Rafael Nadal
Sunday, 3:30 a.m. (ESPN)

Editor's note: Saturday's women's final between Ash Barty and Danielle Collins ended late; see fredericksburg.com

sixth time with a 6-3, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 win in a mostly lopsided contest against seventh-seeded Matteo Berrettini in the first of the men's semifinals.

Medvedev had a more tempestuous and challenging run to back-to-back Australian Open finals. He had to deal with a hostile crowd in his second-round

SEE AUSTRALIAN, B6

For 49ers' aging Gould, quest for title is still gold

BY JOSH DUBOW
AP PRO FOOTBALL WRITER

SANTA CLARA, Calif.—When the San Francisco 49ers placed the franchise tag on Robbie Gould three years ago, the kicker had a decision to make.

He could re-sign or hang up his cleats after a long, successful career and head back home to the Chicago area to be with his wife and three kids.

Gould opted to keep playing, and it was for moments just like Saturday night when his 45-yard kick in a cold, snowy Green Bay delivered the Niners a 13-10 victory that left them two wins shy of Gould's ultimate goal.

"I want to win a Super Bowl," he said. "If it wasn't for that, I wouldn't be playing football. I could care less to play football, and I don't mean that in a bad way. My kids are at an age—they're 8, 6 and 3. I've spent the last six years away from my kids and they mean the world to me."

PRO FOOTBALL



MORRY GASH / ASSOCIATED PRESS

The 49ers' Robbie Gould (9) celebrates his kick that beat the Packers.

TUNE IN

CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIPS
Sunday's games

AFC: Cincinnati (12-7) at Kansas City (14-5), 3:05 p.m. (CBS)

NFC: San Francisco (12-7) at L.A. Rams (14-5), 6:30 p.m. (Fox)

You know, at some point, Dad's going to come home and be Dad for them."

The 39-year-old's ex-

SEE GOULD, B5

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Fighting Irish primed to finally end the Cavaliers jinx



ROBERT FRANKLIN / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dane Goodwin is tasked with providing 3-point scoring for Notre Dame.

BREY HOPING THIS GAME WILL BE THE ONE THAT SNAPS LOSING STREAK

BY MIKE BARBER
RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH

CHARLOTTESVILLE—During his team's pregame shoot-around on Wednesday night in South Bend, Ind., Notre Dame coach Mike Brey sidled up to two of his veterans—Dane Goodwin and Nate Laszewski—and gently reminded them they'd lost four straight times to

TUNE IN

VIRGINIA (12-8)
at NOTRE DAME (13-6)

Joyce Center, South Bend, Ind.
Saturday, 6 p.m. (ACC Network; WRVA-AM 1140)

North Carolina State. His Fighting Irish went on to a 73-65 win. Still, with Virginia visiting the Joyce Center on

Saturday, a team Notre Dame has dropped its last six meetings and 16 of the last 17 against, Brey said he might not bother mentioning that recent history.

"Certainly the guys Saturday have really had our number," Brey said. "I don't even know if I need to bring it up with our veterans because I think they know."

Notre Dame hasn't beaten U.Va. since a 2017 game in South Bend. That vic-

SEE CAVALIERS, B2

Celebrating **50** YEARS

Serving Fredericksburg Area

WELCOME 2022

Purvis Ford
EVERYTHING we do is DRIVEN by YOU

Celebrating **50** YEARS

Serving Fredericksburg Area

PURVIS WANTS TO THANK EVERYONE FOR VOTING

WINNER

BEST OF BURG
2021-22

Best Place to Buy a New Vehicle

WINNER

BEST OF BURG
2021-22

Best Place to Buy Used Vehicle

WINNER

BEST OF BURG
2021-22

Best Auto Repair in Spotsylvania

WINNER

BEST OF BURG
2021-22

Best Auto Parts Supply

WINNER

BEST OF BURG
2021-22

Best Collision Center

SPORTS



« **MLB TRADES PICKING UP**
Mariners make a bold move in shipping prospects to Reds for pitcher Castillo. B2

BIG TROUBLE FOR 76ERS?
Reports say Philadelphia is being probed by the NBA for possible tampering. B3

INSIDE



DARRON CUMMINGS / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kyle Busch wants to stay in the No. 18 Toyota car, but he may be cut loose from Joe Gibbs Racing.

Busch aware '23 pay cut is possible

TWO-TIME CHAMPION KNOWS PROSPECTS ARE DIM WITHOUT SPONSOR

BY JENNA FRYER
AP AUTO RACING WRITER

INDIANAPOLIS— Kyle Busch started his Saturday by joining past winners at the hallowed Indianapolis Motor Speedway for a class photo on the Yard of Bricks.

AUTO RACING

NASCAR CUP SERIES

VERIZON 200 AT THE BRICKYARD
Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Sunday, 2:30 p.m. (NBC)

He was seated next to Arie Luyendyk, in front of Marcus Ericsson, Alexander Rossi and Helio Castroneves—a com-

binated eight Indy 500 titles flanking NASCAR's only active driver with multiple Cup championships.

And yet Busch still

doesn't have a contract for next season. His long-time sponsor is pulling out of NASCAR at the end of the season, and if Joe Gibbs Racing doesn't find a deep-pocketed replacement for M&M's and Mars Inc., Busch will have to find a job elsewhere.

It's an unfathomable predicament for Busch,

SEE NASCAR, B6

POINT AFTER

Steve DeShazo



Mystics learn small things matter during playoffs push

WASHINGTON—Either Shakira Austin or Elena Delle Donne easily could have collected the rebound of Brianna Stewart's missed jumper with three minutes left in Saturday's consequential WNBA Game at the Entertainment and Sports Arena.

The Washington Mystics teammates had no competition for the board, aside from each other. But they managed to tip the ball out of bounds, giving the Seattle Storm another possession. And while that in itself didn't prove decisive in the Mystics' 82-77 loss, it underscored just how fine the line between success and failure can be, with the playoffs looming.

"It was a fairly even game, as far as a lot of stuff," Washington coach Mike Thibault said. "We need to be better, We need to make some of the layups we missed. We need to not turn it over. That had a playoff kind of atmosphere to it. ... and they were better than us on a handful of possessions."

Thibault didn't name names, and no one in the locker room could point

SEE DESHAZO, B3



CRAIG HUDSON / THE WASHINGTON POST

The Mystics' Elena Delle Donne (11) shoots over Seattle's Brianna Stewart.

CAROLINE TEAM IS 'PHENOMENAL' AT SWIM LEAGUE FINALS



PHOTOS BY PETER CIHELKA / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Gracen Kelly (left) of the Caroline Orcas and her dad, team assistant coach Shawn Kelly, go over race results during Saturday's Rappahannock Swim League's American Division finals at the Jeff Rouse Swim & Sport Center in Stafford.

Family, pride making Orcas a splash in RSL

BY MELANIE MARTINEZ-LOPEZ
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Sports has always had a way to bring families and friends together. One team that has embodied bringing people together this summer is the Caroline Orcas.

The Orcas were founded in 2016, making it one of the newest teams within the Rappahannock Swim League.

Since then, the team now boasts 94 competitors and this season 28 records were broken by swimmers in all age groups. The Orcas placed second overall



The Orcas' Nyah Coleman (right) starts off her first-place effort in the girls 50-yard butterfly competition at the swim meet.

in Saturday's RSL finals meet at the Jeff Rouse Swim and Sport Center in Stafford.

"The swimmers swam phenomenal," said head coach Brooke Burr. "They left it all in the pool like they always do."

One of those record-breakers is 9-year-old Alexis Rasnick, who also placed first in two of her events and placed second in the rest.

"(It feels) awesome," Rasnick said. "(I like) that we all swim together and we cheer and support each

SEE SWIMMING, B4

Kerrigan closes out burgundy-and-gold era

DEFENSIVE END RETIRES A REDSKIN, REMINDING TEAM OF THE CHANGES

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
ASSOCIATED PRESS

ASHBURN—Ryan Kerrigan still called Washington's facility by its old name, even though he was wearing a shirt bearing the new logo of the franchise's rebranding as the Com-

PRO FOOTBALL

TRAINING CAMP
At The Park, Ashburn
Through Aug. 18
Details: commanders.com

manders.

That wasn't the only reminder of the old days that weren't that long ago.

Seeing his old teammate

at Commanders training camp brought punter Tress Way, the organization's longest-tenured player, back to the days of Kerrigan flexing after making a sack back when Washington was known as the Redskins. Kerrigan was the final standout player under the old name, and his retirement back in the familiar burgundy and gold colors marks the end

of that chapter for a franchise trying to recapture long-lost glory.

"It's a new era of football here in Washington, and I'm hoping that means a lot of wins in the future, some playoff wins—something that I unfortunately didn't get to experience here," Kerrigan said at his retirement news conference Saturday. "I'm just hoping

SEE KERRIGAN, B3

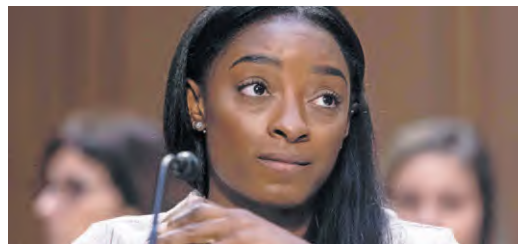


FILE / ROSS D. FRANKLIN / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ryan Kerrigan was a fan favorite when his club was the Redskins and the Washington Football Team.

COMING UP >> NASCAR CUP SERIES RETURNS TO THE BRICKYARD

SPORTS



<< GYMNASTS SUE
Nassar victims seeking \$1 billion from FBI over its handling of abuse investigation. **B4**

BLATTER BEGS OUT
Disgraced former FIFA president claims chest pains on Day 1 of corruption trial. **B6**

INSIDE

Commanders on defense over Del Rio's comments

DEF. COORDINATOR'S
JAN. 6 TWEETS IMPERIL
V.A. STADIUM DEAL

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
ASSOCIATED PRESS

ASHBURN, Va.—An assistant coach for the NFL's Washington Commanders doubled down on a

PRO FOOTBALL

comparison between the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and the protests in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd.

Jack Del Rio, a former linebacker who now runs Washington's defense,



Del Rio

downplayed the deadly insurrection and questioned why the summer of 2020 protests were not receiving the same scrutiny. His comments Wednesday

after an offseason practice came a day before a House committee investigating the pro-Donald Trump disruption of Congress 17 months ago begins public hearings on the matter.

"People's livelihoods are being destroyed, businesses are being burned down, no problem," Del

Rio said. "And then we have a dust-up at the Capitol, nothing burned down, and we're going to make that a major deal. I just think it's kind of two standards."

His comments followed a Twitter post Monday night in which he said, "Would love to understand

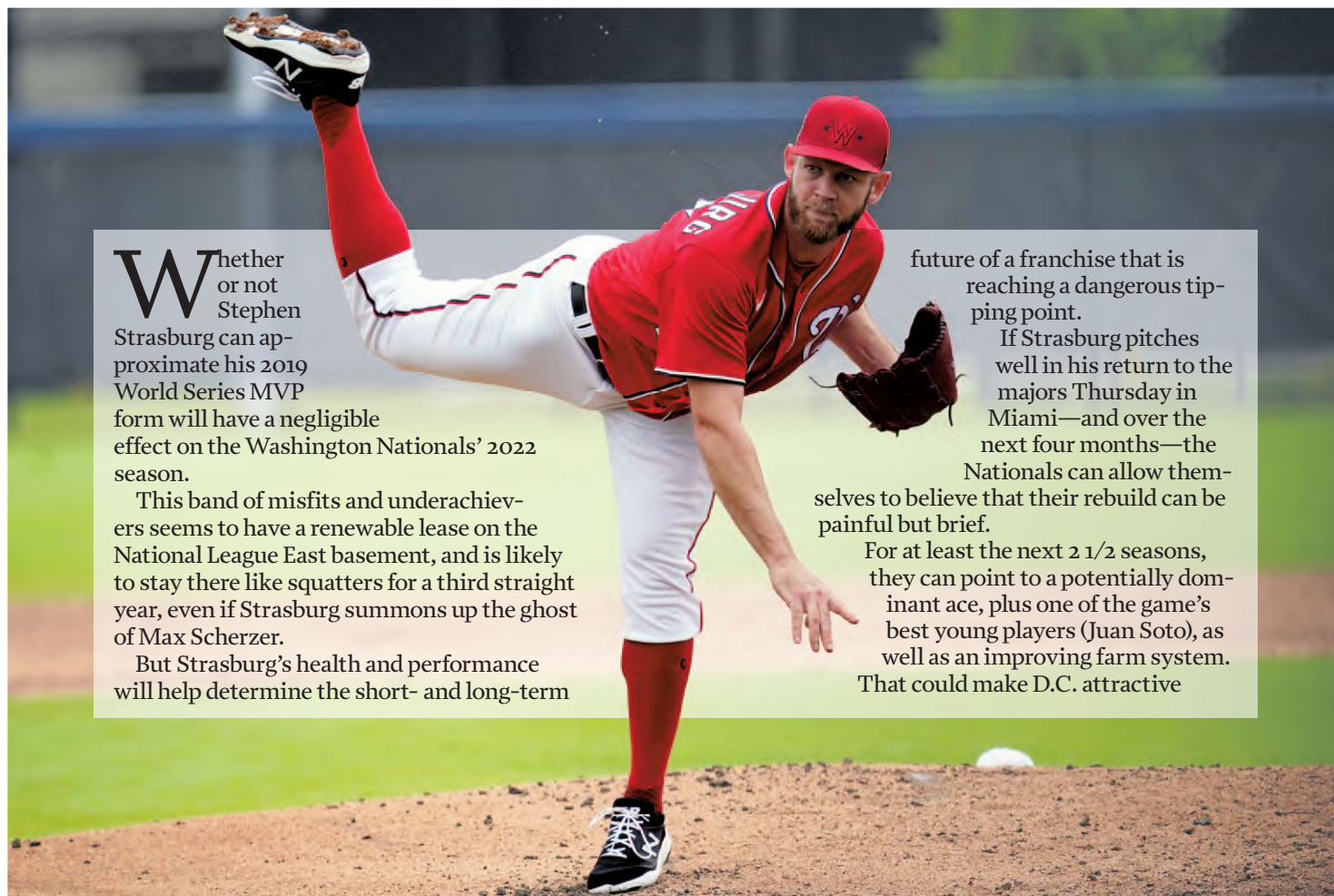
'the whole story' about why the summer of riots, looting, burning and the destruction of personal property is never discussed but this is ???" He was responding to a tweet about the Congressional hearings into Jan. 6.

Del Rio and coach Ron

SEE DEL RIO, B3

PITCHER'S RETURN LOOMS LARGE IN D.C.

Ace high or fold? Stras key to Nats' future plans



Whether or not Stephen Strasburg can approximate his 2019 World Series MVP form will have a negligible effect on the Washington Nationals' 2022 season.

This band of misfits and underachievers seems to have a renewable lease on the National League East basement, and is likely to stay there like squatters for a third straight year, even if Strasburg summons up the ghost of Max Scherzer.

But Strasburg's health and performance will help determine the short- and long-term

future of a franchise that is reaching a dangerous tipping point.

If Strasburg pitches well in his return to the majors Thursday in Miami—and over the next four months—the Nationals can allow themselves to believe that their rebuild can be painful but brief.

For at least the next 2 1/2 seasons, they can point to a potentially dominant ace, plus one of the game's best young players (Juan Soto), as well as an improving farm system. That could make D.C. attractive

SUE OGRICKI / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Nationals pitcher Stephen Strasburg is set to make his season debut on Thursday, making a start against the Miami Marlins.

to free agents and persuade ownership (whomever that is) to invest in them.

That's the upside. The alternative is Strasburg struggles (or worse, injures himself again). The Nationals plummet even deeper into the cellar. Soto and super agent Scott Boras decide they don't want to waste his prime season in a lengthy rebuild, and the Nats either have to trade him or get merely a compensatory draft pick when he signs elsewhere.

Rebuilds are rarely quick and painless. Just ask the Baltimore Orioles, who are five seasons into a teardown and 17 games out of first place in the American League East. And



JEFF DEAN / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Burgeoning superstar outfielder Juan Soto might reconsider his future in D.C. if the franchise is in for a lengthy rebuild.

POINT AFTER

Steve DeShazo

remember, the Lerner family is considering selling the team, with general manager Mike Rizzo and field manager Dave Martinez on expiring contracts.

Washington's existentially divergent paths don't rest completely on Strasburg's surgically repaired right elbow and shoulder, of course. But it's not a stretch to say they will help plot the franchise's future.

SEE DESHAZO, B5

New national horse racing rules on track to be implemented July 1

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
ASSOCIATED PRESS

HORSE RACING

Lisa Lazarus walked around the backstretch at Belmont Park nine days before the final leg of horseracing's Triple Crown selling as much as observing.

The CEO of the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority talked with trainers, riders and other horsemen about the sport's federally mandated new governing body that she has been tabbed to oversee. Lazarus was

peppered with questions and complaints about the new rules that are about to become the national standard.

Once she explained what will change—and what won't—the most common response Lazarus said she got was, "It's nowhere near as bad as I thought it was going to be."

One reason for that reaction at the Belmont? New York is among the

states that already follow many of the safety regulations, which begin July 1, and the antidoping rules, which go into effect at the start of 2023.

Lazarus said the policies that will become federal law about four weeks after this year's final Triple Crown race closely resemble what's already in place in California, Kentucky and New York.

Now that Congress has passed the Horseracing Integrity and Safety

SEE HORSE RACING, B6



STF

The Belmont Stakes is the final Triple Crown race before new federal regulations go into effect July 1.



STEVEN PASTON / AP

Phil Mickelson hasn't spoken publicly during the past four months.

GOLF

Saudi-led tour lands Mickelson in rough

GOLFER COMES UNDER FIRE OVER KINGDOM'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

BY ROB HARRIS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. ALBANS, England—Out of public view for four months, Phil Mickelson returns to golf under severe scrutiny because of where he's playing and who is paying him.

Mickelson is a six-time major champion, the most popular golfer this side of Tiger Woods. And now he is being referred to as a "stooge" by a human rights group for being among 48 players who have signed up for a rebel golf league backed by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund.

"I don't condone human rights violations," Mickelson responded hesitatingly, choosing his words carefully at a terse news conference Wednesday.

Mickelson, who last year made history as the oldest major champion in golf's 161-year history, and Dustin Johnson are the leading faces of the LIV Golf Invitational series, the greatest threat to the PGA Tour since it was formed in 1969.

Along with disrupting the royal and ancient game, it has forced Mickelson and others to weigh the value of taking more money than they have earned in their careers against the kingdom's notorious record on human rights.

The cash being offered by LIV Golf is irresistible, especially for players like the 51-year-old Mickelson in the twilight of their careers. Signing bonus have been reported as high as \$150 million for Johnson, even higher for Mickelson.

The Washington Post quoted Greg Norman, who oversees the circuit, as saying that Woods turned down an offer described as "high nine digits."

There is \$25 million

SEE LIV GOLF, B3