



A poster of Mike Repole, who has donated millions to help St. John’s acquire top players, joined the fans at Madison Square Garden.

SHURAN HUANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

New M.V.P. at St. John’s: A 56-Year-Old Billionaire

In Reshaped N.C.A.A., Backer Helps Mold a Basketball Title Contender

By COREY KILGANNON
As a teenager in Queens, Mike Repole worshiped the great St. John’s University basketball teams of the 1980s, whose stars often came from the gyms and playgrounds of New York City. The team’s tough, defensive brand of championship ball helped Repole, the son of an immigrant waiter and a seamstress, identify with the school. As a student there, he honed the grit that would help him amass a sports-drink fortune.

But as his star was rising, St. John’s basketball declined, with decades of disappointing seasons. Now, Repole’s money, which Forbes magazine estimates at \$1.8 billion, has helped make St. John’s the nation’s sixth-ranked team, with top players acquired from around the nation. It finished the regular season 27-4 and has advanced to Friday’s semifinals in the Big East tournament at Madison Square Garden. Fans have high hopes for a deep N.C.A.A. tournament run after that.

Repole, 56, says the team is reclaiming its greatness. “It’s been missing for 25 years, and now to have it all back is pretty magical,” Repole said during a recent game at Madison Square Garden, where he arrives by private jet from his Florida home and sits courtside near Coach Rick Pitino. With the St. John’s team’s success, Repole has emerged as one of the most striking examples of how money is reshaping college basketball. His backing, which came after a

falling-out with the school, was part of the reason that Pitino, a tarnished Hall of Fame coach, took over the team last season. The billionaire’s money has let Pitino acquire top transfers under new rules that allow college athletes — formerly constrained by the N.C.A.A.’s insistence on amateurism — to profit from their names, images and likenesses, known as N.I.L. “The wild West,” Representative Gus Bilirakis, a Republican from Florida, called it during a

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Racing to Give Afghan Allies A U.S. Lifeline

By MIRIAM JORDAN
The fate of thousands of Afghans waiting to reach the United States after serving with American troops was thrown into limbo after President Trump took office. Now military veterans are scrambling to bring as many of them as possible to the country before the administration introduces a travel ban that could restrict their entry. In an executive order on Jan. 20, Mr. Trump instructed cabinet members, including the secretary of state, to compile a list of countries “for which vetting and screening information is so deficient as to warrant a partial or full suspension on the admission of nationals from those countries.” The order called for the list to be completed within 60 days. As that deadline nears, supporters of the Afghan allies have accelerated efforts to bring to the United States those who are eligible. “We have been engaged in high-intensity, frenetic work,” said Andrew Sullivan, a military veteran and the executive director of No One Left Behind, a nonprofit whose team has been working marathon days to raise money and arrange flights. Amid the chaotic pullout from Afghanistan in August 2021, the U.S. military helped evacuate 78,000 Afghans who worked as interpreters and in other capacities during the war. Tens of thousands of others who aided U.S. forces are still trying to reach the United

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Covid Lessons: Would Schools Shutter Again?

By DANA GOLDSTEIN and SARAH MERVOSH
Over the course of 20 days in March 2020, 55 million American children stopped going to school as Covid-19 swept the United States. What was impossible to anticipate then was that millions of those students would not return to classrooms full-time until September 2021, a year and a half later. Those children and teenagers, often in public schools in Democratic areas, remained online at home while private schools, child-care centers, public schools in conservative regions, office buildings, bars, restaurants, sports arenas and theaters sputtered back toward normalcy. Five years on, the devastating impact of the pandemic on children and adolescents is widely acknowledged across the political spectrum. School closures were not the only reason the pandemic was hard on children, but research shows that the longer schools stayed closed, the farther behind students fell. What would happen if another health crisis came along — a pressing concern, as cases of measles and bird flu emerge? In the face of a new unknown pathogen, how would school leaders and lawmakers make decisions? “It’s so important for Democrats to do a retrospective on this episode,” said Representative

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In China, a Viral Outrage, A Campaign and a Cover-Up

Three years ago, a video blogger visiting a tiny village found a woman chained by the neck like an animal. People mobilized to demand accountability.

Then, those voices disappeared.

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Pick for C.D.C. Is Pulled Hours Before Hearing

Longtime Kennedy Ally Fell Short on Votes

By APOORVA MANDAVILLI and SHERYL GAY STOLBERG
The White House on Thursday withdrew the nomination of Dr. Dave Weldon, a Republican and former Florida congressman, to lead the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention just hours before he was to have appeared at a Senate confirmation hearing.

Reached by phone, Dr. Weldon said he had learned of the decision on Wednesday night and had been told by a White House official that “they didn’t have the votes to confirm” his nomination. In a statement released later on Thursday, Dr. Weldon, 71, blamed Senator Susan Collins, Republican of Maine and a member of the Senate health committee, and Senator Bill Cassidy, Republican of Louisiana and the committee’s chairman, for torpedoing his nomination. A spokesman for Mr. Cassidy said the senator had been “looking forward” to the confirmation hearing. Ms. Collins’s office disputed Dr. Weldon’s account. “I did not express concerns to the White House. I had some reservations, but I certainly had not reached a final judgment,” Ms. Collins said in an interview Thursday. The withdrawal of Dr. Weldon’s nomination, which followed concerns raised during a meeting on Tuesday with Republican Senate aides, is a significant setback for Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the new secretary of health and human services. Dr. Weldon and Mr. Kennedy have known each other for 25 years, and both share a deep skepticism of the federal regulatory approach to vaccine safety. Mr. Kennedy is also confronting a measles outbreak in West Texas and has drawn criticism for promoting treatments like vitamin A and cod liver oil, and describing vaccination as a personal choice with unknown risks. The decision to withdraw the nomination was first reported by Axios. It was unclear if the White House had a backup candidate.

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Republicans In Congress Cede Power

Constitutional Clout Handed Off to Trump

By CARL HULSE and CATIE EDMONDSON
WASHINGTON — The Republican-led Congress isn’t just watching the Trump administration gobble up its constitutional powers. It is enthusiastically turning them over to the White House. G.O.P. lawmakers are doing so this week by embracing a stop-gap spending bill that gives the administration wide discretion over how federal dollars are distributed, in effect handing off the legislative branch’s spending authority to President Trump. But that is just one example of how Congress, under unified Republican control, is proactively relinquishing some of its fundamental and critical authority on oversight, economic issues and more. As they cleared the way for passing the spending measure on Tuesday, House Republicans leaders also quietly surrendered their chamber’s ability to undo Mr. Trump’s tariffs on Mexico, Canada and China in an effort to shield their members from having to take a politically tough vote. That switched off the only legislative recourse that Congress has to challenge the tariffs that are all but certain to have a major impact on their constituents. Republicans have also stood by, many of them cheering, as the administration has upended federal departments and programs funded by Congress and fired thousands of workers with no notice to or consultation with the lawmakers charged with overseeing federal agencies. So far, no congressional committee has held an oversight hearing to scrutinize the moves or demand answers that would typically be expected when an administration undertakes such major changes. “This is us, in a sense, giving the keys to the president to be able to continue to do the great work that they’re doing,” Representative

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Leaders Standing Up to Trump Widen Their Support at Home

By MARK LANDLER
LONDON — In Britain, a languishing prime minister is suddenly a statesman, while his up-and-coming populist rival has been thrown on his heels. In Canada, the incumbent Liberal Party has a chance to win an election long thought out of reach. In Germany, the incoming center-right chancellor is dominating the agenda after an election many feared would be a breakthrough for the hard right. As President Trump’s “shock and awe” policies radiate around the world, they are reshaping global politics in unforeseen ways. Mr. Trump’s tariffs and threats to the trans-Atlantic alliance have breathed life into centrist leaders, who are regaining popularity for their willingness to stand up to the American president. His clash with Ukraine and tilt toward Russia have thrown right-wing populists from Britain to Germany off balance, blunting, for the moment, their efforts to capitalize on Mr. Trump’s restoration to the White House. “One of the great ironies of Trump is that he turns out to be the great unifier of Europe,” said Constanze Stelzenmüller, an expert in trans-Atlantic relations at the Brookings Institution in



Top, Keir Starmer and Mark Carney; above, Claudia Sheinbaum and Friedrich Merz.

Washington. “It is impossible to overstate how shocked Europeans are by what’s happening.” The “Trump bump” goes beyond Europe. In Mexico, President Claudia Sheinbaum has won praise, and stratospheric poll numbers, for her coolheaded handling of Mr. Trump’s tariffs. Mark Carney, a former central banker, was catapulted to the leadership of Canada’s Liberal Party with 86 percent of the vote on the belief that he can manage a trade war

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Plight of Displaced Syrians
Syria’s interim president has said that millions would return, but many homes and buildings are in ruins. PAGE A4

Enduring Images of Pandemic
New York Times photographers share the pictures, and the stories behind them, that have stayed with them. PAGES A12-14



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Wildfires Leave a ‘Toxic Soup’
Scientists collecting water, air and soil samples in ravaged Los Angeles neighborhoods say they’re worried about long-term health risks. PAGE A15

DOGE Website Buries Mistakes
Elon Musk’s group hid details of some new claims, despite promises of transparency. But The Times was still able to detect another batch of errors. PAGE A18

Firings Gut Civil Rights Unit
Many of the Department of Education’s cases over the decades have served as a catalyst for broader policy change and social reforms. PAGE A17

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Correction Territory Breached
The S&P 500 is now more than 10 percent below its last record high — a line in the sand for investors worried about a sell-off gathering steam. PAGE B1

Alaska-to-Asia Gas Pipeline
With the pressure on to buy U.S. energy, Asian buyers are reconsidering a plan once deemed too expensive. PAGE B1

Singer With ‘70s Hits
Gwen McCrae, who sang bouncing, dance-friendly grooves that helped open the door to disco, was 81. PAGE B12

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Sleek, Witty, Engaging Puzzler
Cate Blanchett and Michael Fassbender play a glamorous couple of British spies in “Black Bag,” made to tease. PAGE C1

A Much-Needed Shot of Color
The Botanical Garden is exploding with orchids of myriad hues in a “Mexican Modernism” exhibition. PAGE C10



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Star’s Blessing, and Burden
For Paul Skenes of the Pirates, following a rookie-of-the-year season, he’s on a rise, and a ride, at warp speed. PAGE B7

Newcomer? Tough to Tell.
The University of California, San Diego is in the N.C.A.A. tournament on its first try, the first to do so since 2017. PAGE B9

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