

All-American teams:
Stars lead the way

See which college basketball players top USA TODAY Sports’ women’s and men’s lists. **In Sports**

Hotel staffers dish
on biggest no-nos

Etiquette experts call out check-in bullies, buffet hoarders and other rude guest behaviors. **In Money**

Cameron Crowe’s
‘Uncool’ memoir

“Almost Famous” director looks back on rubbing shoulders with rock royalty in new book. **In Life**



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The NFL has maintained Guardian Caps, which are worn over players’ helmets, have reduced concussions. CHARLES LECLAIRE/IMAGN IMAGES

NFL helmet
covers are
padded
with doubt

Concussion protection
‘uncertain,’ study says

Josh Peter
USA TODAY

The NFL has been a powerful champion of Guardian Caps, the padded football helmet covers the league touts as an effective way to reduce concussions. And NFL commissioner Roger Goodell has made some of the boldest claims.

“It’s actually reduced concussions by 50%,” Goodell said in 2023 during an appearance on the Stephen A. Smith Show.

At annual league meetings in 2024, according to ESPN, Goodell said the Guardian Caps have been “very effective and reduced concussions by 52%.”

But a study involving the NFL’s top medical official suggests otherwise.

A peer-reviewed paper published online in July provides analysis of the study of the concussion rate at NFL preseason practices from 2018 to 2023. It concluded that, when considering concussions caused by blows to the helmet shell, there was no significant difference in the rate of concussions between players who did and did not wear the Guardian Caps, according to a paper published by the American Journal of Sports Medicine.

The study also found the degree of benefits of Guardian Caps “uncertain.”

Allen Sills, the NFL’s chief medical officer, and Thom Mayer, medical director for the NFL Players Association, are listed as coauthors of the research paper.

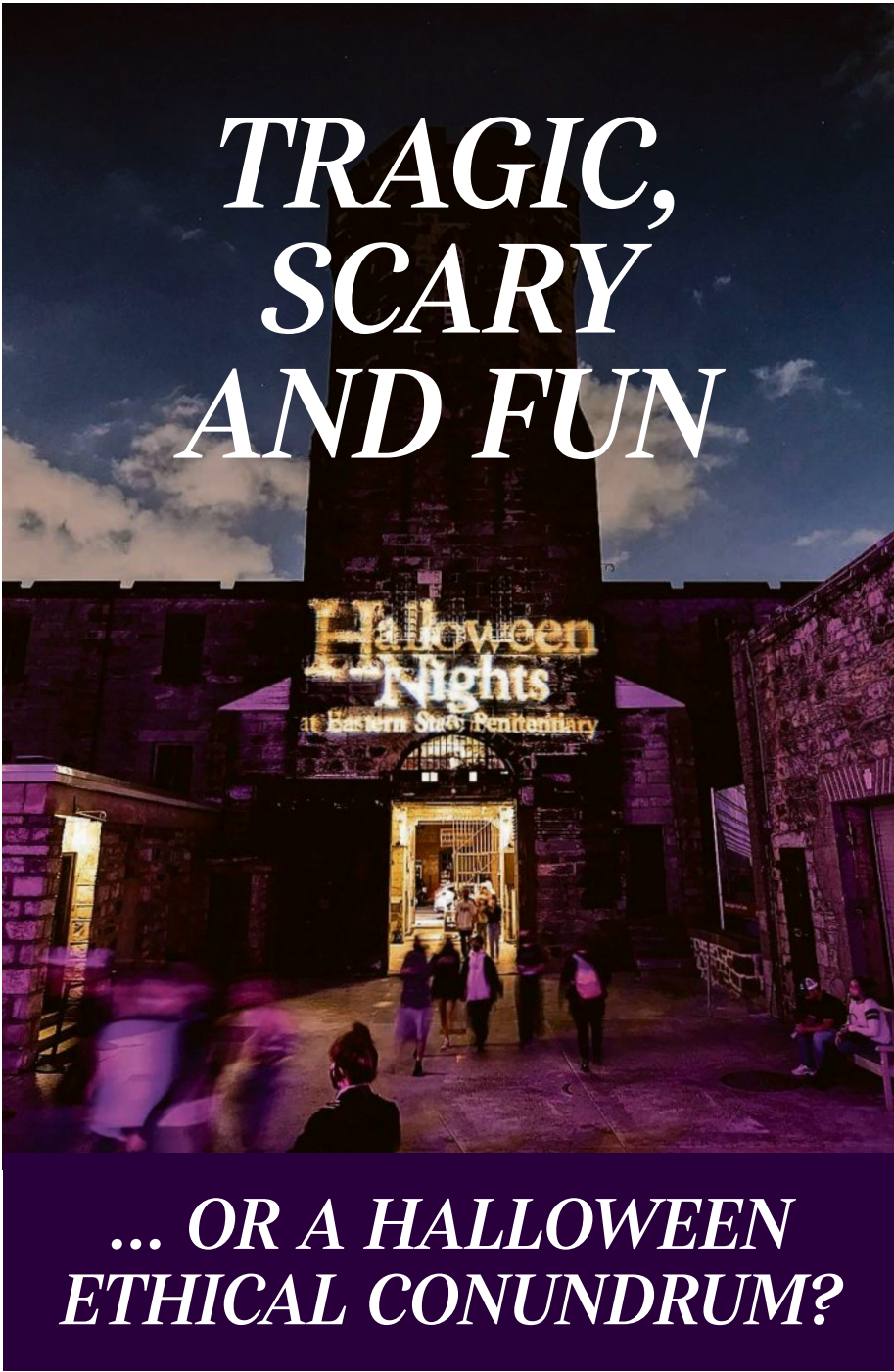
The NFL has not publicly addressed the study, but it has continued to tout the benefits of the Guardian Caps beyond what the study suggests.

An article published on the NFL’s website in August says Guardian Caps “have driven” a significant reduction in concussions in practices – about 50% over the past two preseasons.

In September, Sills said at a webinar that the NFL found a “very striking effect” when players were required to wear the Guardian Caps and that concussions dropped 50% during preseason practices in 2022 and 2023.

Arthur Caplan, a medical ethicist at New York University who has criticized the NFL’s handling of concussions, said of the Guardian Cap study: “I’m concerned that if it didn’t really show credible and warranted evidence that the caps were helping, that maybe there hasn’t been a rush to bring the

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Eastern State Penitentiary hosts Halloween Nights, a festival-like attraction with characters dressed as scary clowns, zombies, vampires and other ghouls – but not prisoners or prison guards. PROVIDED BY EASTERN STATE PENITENTIARY

Historic sites like former prisons and
asylums were the sites of real-life horrors

Phaedra Trethan USA TODAY

For years, Eastern State Penitentiary’s Terror Behind the Walls was arguably the most popular Halloween attraction in Philadelphia, drawing thousands to the 19th century prison that towers like a castle over Fairmount Avenue. ● Actors dressed as sadistic guards and disturbed prisoners, jump-scaring visitors from the prison cells. Giant gargoyles looked down on crowds waiting to get inside a controversial prison with practices British author Charles Dickens once called “cruel and wrong.” ● Today, though, there is no more terror behind these walls, at least not in the way it used to be. The jump scares are still here during the Halloween season, but they’re fictional phantoms like zombies and vampires. The atmosphere is more family-friendly and festival-like, with food and beer, live music and fire pits. See HORROR ETHICS, Page 6A



Eastern State Penitentiary offers year-round historic tours of its 19th century cellblocks and grounds, as well as Halloween-themed attractions. PROVIDED BY BOB WATTS/EASTERN STATE PENITENTIARY

IN OPINION

Columnist asks: Are adults taking “spooky season” away from kids?

IN WEEKEND EXTRA

Visit “City of Souls,” a Halloween hub and towns sure to spook.



Susan Page
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Off-year
elections
may offer
insight

Voters can give signals
to midterms and 2028

There’s a reason the political world is obsessed with the Nov. 4 gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia: They’re the only ones this year.

The off-year elections in two random states, plus the New York City mayor’s race and the California redistricting referendum, provide the first significant opportunities since the 2024 presidential race for voters to weigh in on which party they credit and which one they blame for what’s happened since then.

Whoever wins will make
history: The first female
governor in Virginia.

Can Republicans in New Jersey turn out the new voters who supported Donald Trump even though he’s not on the ballot? Have Democrats in the two states found a template for victory by nominating moderate women with national security backgrounds? Can presidential hopefuls build credibility for 2028 by delivering on favored causes this November?

A dose of caution is advisable. Predictions of what will happen down the road are open to misinterpretation, and whatever signals they send could be overtaken by developments.

That said, here we go. History says Republican Jack Ciatorelli should win in New Jersey.

Never in the past six decades has either party held the Garden State’s governorship for more than two terms in a row, and Democrat Phil Murphy has been in power for the last eight years.

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RONALDO SCHEMIDT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

RFK Jr.: There’s no
solid data linking
Tylenol, autism

More than a month after the White House discouraged Tylenol’s use by pregnant women and young children, Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. says caution should be used if taking Tylenol during pregnancy but solid data linking the drug to autism is lacking. “The causative association ... between Tylenol given in pregnancy and the perinatal periods is not sufficient to say it definitely causes autism. But it is very suggestive,” Kennedy said.

Full story, 2A