

Noah Schnapp ready for life after ‘Stranger Things’

Star opens up about social media scrutiny, invasive fans and saying bye to Will Byers. **In Life**

‘You never know what can happen’: Atlanta stuns LA

Column: Final Monday Night Football game was latest example of crazy NFL season. **In Sports**

‘Bak2Bak’: Car draws double takes in Detroit

Manufacturing engineer creates moving art by taking front ends of two Chrysler minivans and welding them together. **In Money**

USA TODAY

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JUSTIN WAN/USA TODAY NETWORK



Indiana’s QB went from 2,149 to No. 1



Indiana Hoosiers quarterback Fernando Mendoza (15) celebrates with the MVP trophy after defeating the Ohio State Buckeyes in the 2025 Big Ten championship game at Lucas Oil Stadium on Dec 6. ROBERT GODDIN/IMAGN IMAGES

Mendoza credits Cuban heritage for his work ethic

Rick Jervis USA TODAY

MIAMI – Fernando Mendoza sat in the front seat of the rental car on the six-hour drive, dialing one college coach after another.

He had just finished a weeklong visit to some of college football’s most elite programs – Alabama, Clemson, South Carolina, LSU – and Mendoza, then a high school junior, needed to convince them to put him on their roster.

One after another, their answer was “no.”

He ended each call with the corresponding cheer from that team – “Go Tigers!” “Roll Tide!” – characteristically upbeat, despite the rejections.

After checking into a Gainesville hotel with his speed and conditioning coach, Antonio Robinson, Mendoza confided something that had been weighing on him. He’d learned his mom had multiple sclerosis, an incurable disease of the nervous system. He had to win, he told him, for her.

“Bro, you’re good. You’re going to play on Sundays,” Robinson told Mendoza at the time, meaning playing in the NFL. “We don’t know how

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IN SPORTS

Playoff madness

Key players and crucial factors to watch in all four semifinals.

Antonio Robinson, left, a former NFL receiver and speed and conditioning coach, worked with Mendoza while he was in high school and admired his work ethic.

RICK JERVIS/USA TODAY



Democratic socialist Zohran Mamdani will take the oath of office as mayor of New York at midnight Jan. 1. EDUARDO MUNOZ/REUTERS

Mamdani mania is made in the USA

New York’s new mayor has a nation fascinated

Dan Morrison and Ben Adler USA TODAY

NEW YORK – He’s Google’s No. 1 “People” trending search for 2025, and his Wikipedia page was among the 10 most-read.

Republicans have called for him to be deported, while some Democrats say he reminds them of a young Barack Obama. Fashion magazines say he’s a style icon.

Zohran Kwame Mamdani, 34, will take the oath of office as the next mayor of New York City at midnight on Jan. 1 under the Spanish-tiled arches of an opulent former subway station under City Hall in Lower Manhattan.

That private ceremony will be followed by a midday street party for tens of thousands of supporters above ground. In an event expected to draw viewers far beyond the city’s noisy five boroughs, Mamdani will be ceremonially sworn in by his fellow democratic socialist Sen. Bernie Sanders.

The same attributes that make Mamdani a fresh leader for many Americans – Democrat, socialist, millennial, South Asian, Muslim, immigrant – make him a lightning rod for others.

“He’s basically the next AOC,” said Republican political strategist Robert Hornak, referring to Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., a national progressive star. “He’s cut from exactly the same mindset. He’s a villain to the same constituency, and a hero to the same constituency, as her.”

New York mayors don’t usually attract national attention unless they’re in trouble with the law or getting roasted on “Saturday Night Live.” Mamdani

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Times Square ball will help usher in America’s 250th year

USA250

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After the Times Square New Year’s Eve ball drops, it will be relit with a design celebrating the nation’s 250th anniversary. TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Amaris Encinas USA TODAY

The ball will be relit as the United States rings in 2026.

Ahead of the iconic Times Square New Year’s Eve Ball Drop in New York City, America250 announced a “surprise second post-midnight moment” to mark the nation’s 250th anniversary.

Shortly after the ball makes its 60-second descent to signal the start of the new year, it will be relit with an America250 design, rising above the illuminated “2026” numerals at approximately 12:04 a.m. ET.

In addition to the ball’s rekindling, a red, white and blue confetti drop and a “dynamic pyro finale set” to the tune of Ray Charles’ rendition of “America the

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