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E-mail to durhamj@ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481
Lebo takes the helm
By Tony Castleberry
The Daily Reflector
Tuesday, March 23, 2010

East Carolina’s men’s basketball program is starting over again and Director of Athletics Terry Holland is willing to spend some big dollars to get the Pirates moving in the right direction.

The ECU Board of Trustees unanimously approved a six-year, $3.375-million contract for new coach Jeff Lebo, who was introduced at a press conference in the Murphy Center on Tuesday after the board voted for the hire. Lebo replaces Mack McCarthy, who resigned on March 6 and has taken a fundraising job with ECU geared toward accumulating funds to build an on-campus practice facility.

McCarthy was on hand to welcome Lebo, East Carolina’s fourth head coach since the 2004-05 season. The former North Carolina player and Auburn coach, who was fired by the Tigers on March 12, said his goal is to bring the Pirates out of the funk they’ve been in for years.

“The main thing was having a chance to coach at a great place, to try to resurrect a program,” Lebo said of ECU, which hasn’t had a winning season since the 1996-97 campaign, hasn’t finished .500 since 2000-01 and went 10-21 this past season. “I’m used to rebuilding those things. I understand what it takes to get that done.”

In a statement released on Monday announcing the move, Holland called Lebo a “program turner” and that was a big reason ECU’s AD chose him over the other four candidates who reached the interview stage during the search process.

Lebo, 43, has compiled a 211-156 all-time record in 12 seasons as a head coach with three different schools — Tennessee Tech, Tennessee-Chattanooga and Auburn. He’s had at least one
20-win season at each stop and taken two teams — the '01-02 Tennessee Tech squad and the '08-09 Auburn group — to the NIT. He likely won’t have to have that kind of success at ECU to be here through the end of his six-year deal, which includes a $50,000 bonus for going .500 or better in conference games and a $100,000 pay bump for making it to the NCAA tournament. Just bringing the program to respectability would be a welcome change for most Pirate fans and Holland is convinced Lebo’s the right man to do it.

"I cannot tell you how many calls we’ve gotten that have said, ‘You guys got real lucky,’” Holland said. “I think that is the case, because coach Lebo moved the Auburn program from an absolute disaster. ... (and) by the fifth year, they won 24 games and 10 (Southeastern) Conference games, both of which are the second-most in Auburn basketball history. He turned that program around.

“I can honestly say to you that destiny stepped in again in favor of East Carolina University.” Lebo in turn expressed his gratitude to Holland and the ECU administration for bringing him on board.

“I feel like the luckiest guy in the world right now,” Lebo said. “I was never so happy to get a 4 a.m. wake-up call to catch a plane to come here today.” Lebo’s wife, Melissa, is from Williamston and ECU’s new coach admitted that moving closer to his wife’s family, not to mention returning to the state where he played for legendary coach Dean Smith, factored into the decision somewhat. A certain seafood restaurant in Williamston apparently held some sway too.

“The biggest thing was, I can get to the Sunny Side Oyster Bar in Williamston more than once a year.

Contact Tony Castleberry at tcastleberry@reflector.com or (252) 329-9591.
Lebo takes on ECU challenge

GREENVILLE -- Jeff Lebo knows what he's walking into at East Carolina: A program that hasn't had a winning season in 13 years and hasn't been to the NCAA tournament in even longer.

Yet Lebo also believes that he can reverse the Pirates' feeble basketball fortunes.

"It can happen," the new coach said Tuesday. "I told our players, 'You watch Butler, you watch Northern Iowa play in the NCAA tournament. So why can't that be East Carolina?'"

It's a question that has been asked here repeatedly over the years. And Lebo - who met with reporters and Pirates fans at his introductory news conference - has been successful in rebuilding efforts at Tennessee Tech and Chattanooga. But East Carolina offers a unique set of challenges outside of the obvious on-court struggles.

It's a school with a fan base that's passionate and turns out in droves for football yet is often disengaged and leaves plenty of empty seats in Minges Coliseum when it comes to basketball.

Not to mention there's the challenge of building a successful program in the shadows of spotlight-hogging ACC programs Duke, North Carolina and N.C. State.

Lebo, 43, knows all about the dynamics here. He played for Dean Smith at North Carolina in the 1980s, and his wife is a North Carolina native with family in Williamston, less than an hour's drive from campus.

"We've got to understand what it takes for a good team to win and win consistently," Lebo said. "The first thing is getting that fan base back out. I've seen the passionate Pirate fans at the football games. I know it can happen here in basketball. This state loves basketball. I know that certainly firsthand."

Lebo spent the past six seasons at Auburn before he was fired earlier this month after compiling a 96-93 record at the school, though he was hampered by an outdated coliseum and let go with the Tigers preparing to open a $90 million arena next season.

Lebo received a six-year deal at East Carolina worth about $3.4 million, excluding performance incentives.

Lebo replaces Mack McCarthy, who spent three seasons on the sidelines for the Pirates before stepping down to take a fundraising job in the school's athletics department.

Lebo is the 11th coach at the program during a stretch in which the Pirates have had 28 losing seasons in 35 years. East Carolina hasn't been to the NCAA tournament since 1993, and its last winning record came in the 1996-97 season. In the years since, East Carolina has reached .500 once and compiled a 141-230 record.

"It's not going to happen overnight," said athletic director Terry Holland, who coached Ralph Sampson
at Virginia in the early 1980s. "He's going to have to get his own kids in here as well and gradually build what he wants to do and how he wants to play. It's not a matter of whether the players are good, it's whether or not they fit the way he feels most comfortable playing."

"He's very flexible. That's one of the things that's impressive. He doesn't coach a system, he coaches the players."

At the least, Holland finally managed to pull a successful recruiting job on Lebo this time around. Holland recalled his days of trying to recruit Lebo to play for him at Virginia, even remembering a time when someone broke out a car window to steal his stereo while he was inside a gym watching Lebo play.

Lebo said Virginia made his final list before he opted to play for Smith and the Tar Heels. There wasn't much hesitation to join Holland's team this time around.

"This is a perfect place for me," Lebo said. "When he offered the job to me, I didn't even have to think about it for more than one second."
Editorial: Lebo the latest to accept Pirate challenge

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

When Terry Holland accepted the athletics director post at East Carolina University in 2004, excitement was palpable throughout the Pirate faithful, especially among fans of the men’s basketball team. It was hoped that Holland, given his long and storied career in the sport, would help East Carolina emerge from the shadows of other in-state schools and compete within its conference.

On Tuesday, Holland introduced Jeff Lebo as the new head basketball coach, the third Holland hire for that program during his tenure. While it will take considerable effort and a long-term commitment to build a winning team, there is ample reason to believe Lebo can breathe life into a program bereft of it.

When Head Coach Mack McCarthy resigned after three years in that post, Holland could have gone in a number of directions to find his replacement. Some hoped luring a big name to Greenville would provide the Pirates a rare turn in the March spotlight. Coaching-legend-turned-broadcaster Bobby Knight, reportedly contacted about the job, certainly would have fit that description.

However, it was Knight’s other qualities that made him attractive, namely his reputation for running a clean program and routinely posting some of the highest graduation rates in the nation. His teams were successful on and off the court.

Those same qualities appear present in Lebo, hired this week as the 23rd head coach in East Carolina history. Though he was recently fired from the same position at Auburn University, he led the Tigers to 24 wins in 2008-09 and earned a bid to the NIT Tournament that year. He struggled to compete consistently in the brutal Southeastern Conference, though he operated a program of integrity during his six-year stint there.

Touted by Holland as a “program-turner,” Lebo’s work at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and Tennessee Tech before that show steady improvement over time. That reputation will be tested at East Carolina, which last earned a post-season bid in 1993 and has seen 13 years pass since posting a winning record. And Lebo played college ball at the University of North Carolina, so his ties to the state are well established.

There are some who believe that Pirate basketball is a lost cause, and certainly Lebo faces a sisyphian task. Yet the East Carolina faithful is nothing if not loyal, and should have confidence that this marks the turning point on the road to success.
Small crowd but lively debate on underage drinking
By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector
Tuesday, March 23, 2010

A lively debate on the issues surrounding underage drinking was hosted Tuesday evening by the Pitt County Substance Abuse Coalition, despite drawing only a dozen attendees. Coalition Executive Director Margaret Blackmon said hundreds of invitations were sent out, but she considered the event a good experience regardless of turnout.
"The discussion was so passionate because there are people that are really interested in the subject," she said. "You have to start a dialogue somewhere about why we’re doing what we do."
Those people included a panel of three young community members, each of whom offered a perspective on the topic. ReStart Behavioral Services therapist Monica Shamdasani, 27, said she primarily treats adults, but many are exhibiting behaviors learned at a young age.
“They started their drug and alcohol use when they were 12, 13, 14,” she said, noting it’s more than innocent experimentation. “They have no coping skills anymore. They have no social skills anymore.”
Shamdasani also said she has seen parents provide alcohol for teens because they’d rather have them drink at home than somewhere else.
The second panelist, 23-year-old Lauren Dedrick, recounted the tale of two East Carolina University freshmen who drank to excess with a group of young men, only to be thrown out of a truck and onto Dedrick’s yard when they started throwing up.
“I almost feel like a hypocrite because I was a participant (in underage drinking) at one point of time in my life,” Dedrick said. She said that young people must be aware of the terrible things that can happen when they’re drunk or around those drinking too much.
Ayden-Grifton High School sophomore LaQuon Rogers, 16, said underage drinking permeates the community — from what kids see at home, to drinking at school and in the neighborhoods with friends.
Backing up the panelists’ personal stories were some sobering statistics taken during a spring 2009 Pitt County Youth Risk behavior survey. The numbers show that the number of middle and
high school students who have tried alcohol is rising, while perception of the risks associated with drinking remains lower than for tobacco or marijuana. Only two other young people were in the audience, but the adults attending had plenty of questions for the panel.

N.C. Rep. Marian McLawhorn asked what classes or seminars ECU offers incoming freshmen on alcohol use. Dedrick said there is an alcohol education class required, but said she’s not sure how much good it does. Others in the audience agreed that students don’t seem to retain those lessons. Shamdasani prompted several comments about the drinking culture in Greenville and Pitt County, known as “G-Vegas,” and the perception of ECU as a party school.

Pitt County District Attorney Clark Everett said he’s seeing higher blood-alcohol content following drunk driving stops or wrecks, and that more women are drinking to excess. That, he said, can lead to sexual assaults that are near impossible to prosecute.

The actions parents should also take were discussed during the two-hour event. Rogers said his peers learn drinking is OK when their parents take part. Others, including Greenville City Councilwoman Kandie Smith, advocate for drinking responsibly and setting a good example, coupled with open communication.

“If parents were more honest with their kids about what they did when they were young, it could really make a difference,” Dedrick said.

Blackmon said the coalition is trying to regroup in order to better address these issues in a task force, goal-oriented way. Dr. David Ames of the Eastern N.C. Council on Substance Abuse said Pitt County also is helping develop a model for pediatricians to provide information on substance abuse to parents.

Contact Kathryn Kennedy at k kennedy@reflector.com or (252) 329-9566.
Nearly 200 from around region attend grant workshop at GTP Monday

David Anderson
2010-03-22 21:00:59

Although Sen. Kay Hagan's, D-N C., primary focus this week is on federal health care legislation, she was still able to reach out to Eastern North Carolina on Monday, as members of her staff hosted a regional grant workshop in Kinston.

About 200 people from Lenoir, Greene, Jones and neighboring counties visited the Global TransPark Center for the four-hour forum on how government agencies, nonprofits and small businesses can obtain grants from federal, state, local or foundation sources.

"That is why it's so important for us to hold sessions like this, to make sure funding goes to designated local projects and that government red tape does not stand in the way," Hagan said in a video introduction shown to the audience.

A handful of Hagan's North Carolina staffers led the forum, including Chris Sgro, grants director.

"We want to have people understand the full spectrum of funding opportunities," he said.

Several Kinston city officials attended the meeting, including Councilman Bobby Merritt and Project Coordinator Diadra Powell.

"Any time that there's an opportunity for us to learn more about grants — because that's money we don't have to pay back — that's a positive thing," Powell said.

Jones County also had a presence, which included school board members and County Manager Franky Howard.

Howard said he learned of potential funding sources for school construction and a county water system; he is also planning to meet with a Hagan representative this week to discuss local economic development.

"(There's) certainly a lot of potential," he said.

The Rev. Julian Pridgen, pastor of Kinston's St. Augustus A.M.E. Zion Church, attended workshops on education and housing funding.

"I appreciate them coming and trying to help us help ourselves," Pridgen said.

Alanna King, spokeswoman for the Global TransPark, said GTP officials had already looked into many of the funding sources presented Monday, but thought it was a good educational opportunity for smaller businesspeople.

"For organizations (that) don't necessarily have the staff to research the different funding sources that are out there that may be available to them, it was a good forum," she said.

Hagan staffers also discussed her Greenville office, which is scheduled to open in two to three weeks to serve Eastern North Carolina constituents.

"We will handle the same types of issues as any of the other (state) offices, and serve as a conduit to ensure that information is channeled to appropriate office to handle the situation as it relates to the federal government," said Joyce Mitchell, the eastern regional liaison.

David Anderson can be reached at 252-559-1077 or danderson@freedomnc.com.
Duke maintains salary freeze

DURHAM -- Duke University employees won't get raises this year.

The university, which froze salaries last year trying to shave $125 million from its operating budget over three years, has announced that the freeze will continue.

Instead, employees earning $80,000 or less will receive a one-time payment of $1,000.

The freeze and one-time payment won't apply to employees of the Duke University Health System, officials said. There will be a separate plan for them.

Duke President Richard Brodhead announced the salary plans in a recent letter to faculty and staff.

In it, he wrote in part: "Duke simply cannot make permanent salary increases at this time without aggravating our future budget problems and jeopardizing jobs. [And] again this year, we have directed our compensation to those at the low and middle ends of our salary spectrum, recognizing they face particular challenges in these economic times. This year's $1,000 supplement will benefit a significant majority of our employees."
Farmers markets take root on campus

If it's true that college students live on pizza and hot wings, then what is a farmers market doing in the middle of the N.C. State University campus?

The stereotype of the student diet, while still common, is changing, market organizers say. The fact that the market is in its second year and has doubled the number of vendors is proof.

"There's a small but growing number of students who are interested in better food, and it's growing quickly," says Eric Ballard, who helped found the market. "We see regulars every week who look forward to the market, and we always get new customers."

Each Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. during the spring and fall semesters, tents go up in a corner of the Brickyard for eight vendors of North Carolina products. They're selling fresh produce, salsa, soaps, cheeses, meats, eggs and more.

The market will be open through May 5 and reopen Sept. 2 and run through Nov. 18. The market doesn't operate at times when the campus is closed, such as spring break.

The market was a student-driven idea. In 2009, Ballard and other students got interested in sustainable agriculture and wanted a way to make good, sustainably produced food available on campus.

The idea of farmers markets on college campuses isn't new - one operates at Duke University, among others - but the NCSU market may be unusual in the level of student involvement in running it.

In 2009, students talked to university administrators about organizing a market, says Ballard, who has since graduated but still works with the market.

The administration and students liked the idea, but a campus market was a harder sell to farmers and vendors.

"At first, we had to beg vendors to come," Ballard says. "Out of about 30 I would approach, four would agree. Now we have vendors calling us."

The market requires that at least 70 percent of the goods vendors sell are their own. Vendors pay a fee of $5 per day.

Ron West of Carolina Grits & Co. in Rocky Mount sells grits and cornmeal each week at the market. "I've been pleasantly surprised at the response," he says.

The Pasta Fairy - aka Andrea Morrell - drives from Boone to sell her handmade frozen filled ravioli. She sees the campus market as a chance to meet customers and other vendors to raise awareness of her product in the Raleigh area.

The market has a blog, http://campusfarmersmkt.wordpress.com/. Market manager Ariel Ruth Fugate, a
sophomore, sends weekly e-mail messages about market specials to a listserv with 300 members. Plus, the market has 1,000 Facebook friends and 150 Twitter followers.

Because students do eventually graduate, Fugate says that the group is organizing student committees to keep the market going. There are committees for education, fundraising, publicity and market management, along with a faculty adviser.

She thinks that the interest among students and others in the university community -- maybe beyond, into nearby neighborhoods and restaurants - will continue to grow.

"We think that if students buy this food and taste it, they'll see the difference in flavor," Fugate says.

At a recent market, freshman Elizabeth Wait stopped to buy apples from Wise Farms in Mount Olive, which was one of the first vendors to sign on.

"Living in the dorm, it's hard to get out to get fresh things. It was really nice last fall when they had watermelons," Wait said. "I like the availability. I'm glad the market is here because you can get healthy snacks."

"You can walk right through and get lunch between classes," says sophomore Amanda Wilkins, pointing out different vendors. "There's peanut butter there and bread there."

Faculty and staff take advantage of the market, too.

"I can do my shopping here," says Kim Howell, a research assistant. "This market is the greatest thing in the world."

Even if there isn't a hot wing in sight.

Reach Debbie Moose at www.debbiemoose.com.
Shaw gets $31 million loan

RALEIGH -- Shaw University has secured a $31 million federal loan with help from U.S. Rep. Bob Etheridge, a windfall Shaw officials are celebrating as a financial lifeline to the cash-strapped school.

The federal loan shifts millions owed to Bank of America to the U.S. Department of Education, stretches Shaw's debt out over 20 years, reduces collateral and drops the interest rate nearly two points to 4.1 percent, according to a memo from interim Vice President Lee Monroe.

But as Shaw fights its way out of a mountain of debt, there is a sense that the school's top officials are neglecting their share of the burden.

On March 15, the school's Florida alumni group sent e-mail to Shaw administrators saying it was "amazed" that giving among board members had totaled only $41,089 since July. Last spring, board chairman Willie Gary pledged that each of the school's roughly 40 board members would contribute $50,000 to the cause.

"There were questions which were quite puzzling [such as] what contributed to the lack of leadership in giving by the board members in this time of financial crisis at Shaw U?" said the message sent by Larry Williams, interim co-chairman of Florida Alumni Network.

In his message, Williams noted that alumni had contributed $300,000. He declined comment Monday.

Further Shaw documents show a history of unpaid pledges. According to private audits conducted between 2002 and 2006, a single board member owes at least $7 million in money promised to the university. The audits, conducted by The Wesley Peachtree Group in Atlanta, do not name the board member.

Asked about board giving, Interim President Dorothy C. Yancy said she has asked for financial support from all board members but has not attempted to collect any unpaid pledges. Gary made a $10 million pledge in 1991, shortly before becoming Shaw's board president. Yancy said she did not know whether the unpaid $7 million was part of that pledge. "You need to ask him," she said.

Gary did not return repeated calls to his Florida law firm about the 1991 pledge. Shaw's national alumni association president Emily Perry declined to comment about money from board members, and several other members could not be reached for comment. Monroe, Shaw's interim vice president, did not return a call.

About 2,700 students attend Shaw. Its board consists of educators, business people and Baptist officials in North Carolina, Florida and New York, as well as boxer Evander Holyfield and boxing promoter Don King, according to Shaw's Web site.

Shaw's financial developments and alumni concerns come as the school is seeking a new president and preparing for its accreditation to be renewed in 2012.
The school's money troubles resonate with other small, private black colleges across the country, many of which are struggling to survive as donations dry up in the recession. In February, President Barack Obama signed an executive order making historically black colleges eligible for more federal programs.

Last week, Yancy said the federal loan restructures several pieces of privately held debt. She would not disclose the size of the loan, citing Shaw's status as a private college. Officials at the Department of Education confirmed the amount is roughly $30 million, as described in Monroe's memo.

"The debt needed to be renegotiated," Yancy said. "I don't think people publish what they owe, and this is a private institution."

Yancy said her office called Etheridge when the loan got tied up before its February closing date. She said the deadline wasn't dire but rather a goal set by Shaw.

"You know how you have your mind set on something?" Yancy asked. "I was looking forward to that date, and it looked like it was going to go into March."

Etheridge said Shaw's president and attorney contacted his office, calling it an urgent matter, and he spoke with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan about moving quickly. He did not know either the size of the loan or the terms, he said.

"We never ask that," he said. "We don't have any business knowing that... Certainly Shaw is the oldest historically black institution in the South. They're important not only to Raleigh but our district. But we try to take all the calls from our constituents whether they're small or large."

josh.shaffer@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4818
Student aid overhaul passes House

Private lenders would no longer provide federally subsidized college loans -- it would all come straight from the U.S. government.

By Walter Hamilton and Larry Gordon

March 23, 2010

The federal government is moving toward the most sweeping overhaul of college financial aid in decades.

The House of Representatives voted for the measure as part of its passage of healthcare legislation Sunday.

Under the proposal, private lenders would no longer make federally subsidized student loans. Instead, the government would make all such loans itself, instead of only some as it does now.

Eliminating the middleman would save the government an estimated $61 billion over the next decade. About $36 billion of that would be used to increase so-called Pell grants for lower-income students. The legislation also allocates $2.5 billion to historically black colleges, $2 billion to community colleges and at least $10 billion to reduce the federal deficit.

The Senate is expected to take up the measure as early as this week.

Backers of the move hailed it as a boon for students struggling to pay for college in a tough economy.

"This is incredibly good news for students and families and taxpayers," said Lauren Asher, president of the Project on Student Debt, a nonprofit advocacy group in Berkeley, Calif. "Taxpayer dollars that were being used to guarantee private lenders' profits are now being redirected to student aid and other important reforms to help keep college more affordable."

The bill would boost annual Pell grants, which go to about 6 million students, to a maximum of $5,975 by 2017 from $5,550 this year.
Without the legislation, the grants could be cut in coming years to offset a funding shortfall.

But other advocates said the bill wouldn't do enough to ensure cash-strapped families access to college.

An earlier version would have boosted the maximum Pell grant to $6,900. And even though the grants would be indexed to inflation for the first time, that provision would be in effect for only five of the next 10 years, said Mark Kantrowitz, publisher of Finaid.org, a college-aid website.

"It's falling far short of tuition inflation," he said. "It could have been a lot better."

Thirty years ago, Pell grants covered 77% of the average tuition at a public university, Asher said. That's down to 35% today.

The financial industry has lobbied hard against the bill, arguing that it would cost jobs at student-loan companies, which would still have contracts to service some student loans.

Kevin Bruns, executive director of America's Student Loan Providers, a trade group, predicted the legislation would reduce the quality of service to borrowers because private operators would make lower profits.

"The margins on service contracts are pretty narrow," he said.

Sarah Bana, 21, an economics major and student government activist at UC Irvine, was in Washington this week to lobby for the bill.

"It was beautiful to see legislators finally speaking up for students and students' rights," she said.

Bana, a senior, said she received a $3,400 Pell grant this year and about $12,400 in other financial aid.

Pell grants "are definitely a big factor for me being able to come to college," she said.

Nancy Coolidge, the UC system's coordinator of student financial support, said she was very pleased about the bill, especially its protection of the Pell grants. More than 55,000 UC students receive Pells, totaling about $200 million a year and averaging about $3,500 per UC recipient, she said.

If the bill had failed, the maximum Pell grant would have dropped to about $2,150, less than half the $5,500 maximum projected for next year, she said. "So this is a very good outcome. It's a big relief," she said.

The legislation's provisions on loans wouldn't affect UC students much because all 10 UC campuses have already opted to offer loans directly from the federal government, avoiding private lenders.

One benefit would be a slightly lower interest rate for parents who take out federal Plus loans,
Coolidge said. And students who started out with private bank loans would be able to consolidate those with direct government loans when they graduate, she said.

Whittier College and Stanford University also were among the schools that were planning to switch to direct loans by fall, whether the bill passed or not.

Whittier's vice president for enrollment, Lisa Meyer, said she hopes the loan application will be "simpler for families" than the one involving private banks issuing federally guaranteed loans.

If direct loans become mandatory nationwide, she said, "there may be some bumps along the way as colleges figure out what we need to do and the government figures out the level of support colleges need. But I anticipate in the long run, it will be a positive thing."

Jack Scott, the chancellor of California's community colleges, said he was "thrilled" that the bill included funding for community colleges to develop and improve career and trade training and programs that help students stay in school at historically black and minority-serving colleges.

The funds would be awarded through competitive grants, so it's too soon to say what the effect would be in California, he said.

About 30 of the state's 110 community colleges would be eligible to apply for the minority grants based on their high enrollments of Latinos.

walter.hamilton@

latimes.com

larry.gordon@latimes.com

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