



Beckett Callan/Freeman Staff

Brookfield sophomore Eric Hou swims the 100-yard butterfly during a Classic 8/Greater Metro Conference dual meet at Brookfield Central High School on Jan. 9.

Blackshirts win battle, but Barracudas take war

By Beckett Callan
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BROOKFIELD — It's not often a team loses more events than its opponent and still comes away with a victory. But most teams aren't Brookfield boys swimming.

The No. 1-ranked Barracudas boast depth like few others in Waukesha County, and that depth was needed in full as Brookfield ground out an impressive 98-82 victory over No. 4 Waukesha South/Catholic Memorial on Jan. 9 at Brookfield Central High School.

"We have 47 kids in the program," Barracudas head coach Van Donkersgoed said. "We have a lot of depth, a lot of options. This dual meet was really fun because it was close, which is nice."

The Barracudas don't often get duals as close as on Jan. 9. As the No. 1-ranked team in the state, Brookfield often barrels its way through opponents.

"We've had other meets where they just don't have the body count to compete," Donkersgoed said.

Most other teams that Brookfield faces aren't South/CMH. The Blackshirts boast several top swimmers, many of whom will likely be fighting

for podium places come the state meet in March.

One of those swimmers is junior John Brostowitz. Brostowitz finished eighth in the 100-yard butterfly at state last year but took first place in the 200 individual medley and the 100 breaststroke on Jan. 9.

"Ultimate goal is to win state," Brostowitz said. "We want to keep those relays going, too. We've been trying to push at least those relays. It's a team goal of ours. So the goal is winning state individually and then getting as high as we can in those relays."

Brookfield won two of the three relays on the night, taking first in the 200 medley relay and the 200 freestyle relay. Brostowitz anchored South/CMH's winning relay team in the 400 freestyle relay, the final event of Thursday's dual.

Despite the Blackshirts winning seven of the 12 events on Jan. 9, Brookfield managed to finish one-two in two events and have two swimmers or relay teams finish in the top three in seven others.

"As far as dual meets go it's about trying to get up and beat people," South/CMH coach Blaine Carlson said. "We had a couple of races where we got one-two'd and that kind of hurt us. But they've got a good team and we've got some good guys as well. It's just fun to get them together and race."

Another of the meet's top performers was

Brookfield sophomore Logan Loppnow. Loppnow made a big splash last year as a freshman, finishing fifth and taking home a medal at state in the 100 freestyle. Loppnow showed his freestyle ability again on Jan. 9, taking first in the 50 and the 100 free.

"I mean, the kid's a sophomore, right?" Donkersgoed said. "He's really bought into the program. He trains really hard and has a lot of talent. I think the only way is up for him."

Despite Brookfield's victory on Jan. 9 and its No. 1 ranking in the Wisconsin Interscholastic Swim Coaches Association (WISCA) poll, Donkersgoed seemed reserved about his expectations for the Barracudas going forward.

"I mean, I don't think we can beat Middleton (ranked No. 2 in the state)," Donkersgoed said. "I'll be on record about that. I think they have the personnel that we don't have in individual events. I think our relays will be competitive."

The state meet is still over a month away, and whether or not Brookfield can beat Middleton remains to be seen. However, both Brookfield and South/CMH will likely have several swimmers challenge for podium places and could be in the hunt for a state championship come late February.

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Brian Huber/Freeman staff

Tim Weiberg, owner of the Picnic Basket in Nashotah, is seen in front of a wall adorned with photos and other memorabilia about legendary Milwaukee Brewers broadcaster Bob Uecker, who passed away on Jan. 16 at age 90. Weiberg said Uecker had a way of making even the most painful of Brewers games enjoyable through his stories accumulated through his decades in the baseball world.

Remembering Mr. Baseball

By Brian Huber
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NASHOTAH — Paul Kraemer of Pewaukee had a couple of appointments on Jan. 16 and stopped at the Picnic Basket in Nashotah for lunch, unaware of the Bob Uecker memorabilia that adorns the restaurant just off Highway 16 on Highway C. But when he walked to a table and saw the photos and mementos of Uecker shortly after learning of Uecker’s passing at age 90 on Jan. 16, he thought it would make an appropriate place to spend some time reflecting and honoring the memory of the man who, despite a career .200 batting average, became known as “Mr. Baseball.”

“I kind of smiled and reflected back on how many decades that he’s been an integral part of the Brewers franchise, known nationally and internationally,” Kraemer said of his reaction when he heard the news. “His stories and color commentary were amazing and you never knew what to expect.”

Uecker, a Milwaukee native, played in seven major league seasons, breaking in with his hometown Milwaukee Braves, before moving on to St. Louis, Philadelphia, and then the Atlanta Braves. He later joined the Milwaukee Brewers as a radio broadcaster, spending more than 50 seasons behind the microphone, but that was only part of a career that saw him make dozens of appearances on “The Tonight Show” with Johnny Carson, as well as his spots as a pitchman in the classic Miller Lite commercials. He took star turns in the TV series “Mr. Belvedere,” and took his fame to another level as the whiskey-drinking broadcaster Harry Doyle in the “Major League” movies. His self-deprecating humor endeared him to generations of Milwaukee Brewers fans, and many millions more around the nation and the world.

Tim Weiberg, owner of the Picnic Basket, said his display of Uecker memorabilia at the restaurant came about as a result of listening to games over the years since he started following the team as a youngster in 1982. In a tribute Uecker no doubt would have appreciated, Weiberg said in furnishing décor for the restaurant, autographed items by stars like Robin Yount or Paul Molitor commanded higher prices, where Uecker items were “pennies on the dollar” comparatively — but they added up to bring a charm to the restaurant as unique as Uecker himself.

“He was just great to listen to. It didn’t matter if the game was bad, the Brewers weren’t playing good, if Rob Deer was striking out, you got Bob Uecker on there making the broadcast great. Whether you were in the backyard, fishing, driving up north, Bob Uecker was there with you,” Weiberg said. “I would say there is more value, as

great a player as Robin Yount and Paul Molitor were, Bob Uecker brought more value to that franchise than anyone else. ... His presence on the radio was just unbelievable for the franchise.”

Sitting in front of the wall of Uecker memorabilia next to Kraemer, Allen Andreasen of Nashotah and Tim Eckblad of Racine enjoyed lunch and shared thoughts about Uecker’s passing. Eckblad said Uecker’s stories from his own baseball career enhanced the Brewers broadcasts.

Andreasen said his son works in media, and told him on Jan. 16 that those who saw him regularly will miss the “very friendly guy.”

Patty Derrico of Waukesha said she ran into Uecker years ago at McKinley Marina in Milwaukee; Uecker was well-known for his love of fishing.

“One of the most personable guys you ever saw,” she said. “Warmth exuded from him and the humor just topped it off.”

On the wall next to the cash register hangs a model of Bernie Brewer’s original chalet, with a slide into a barrel at the bottom. It was made a few years ago by Steve Hansen of Hartland, who just so happened to be enjoying lunch at the Picnic Basket on Thursday. He said Uecker was like a grandfather to many people, and said it was the end of an era for Brewers fans everywhere.

“It’s horrible, sad. ... It really sucks,” he said. “It’s kind of like you grew up with him. He’s always been there. It’s weird. Opening Day is going to be a heartbreaker.”

Tributes

Uecker has been a Waukesha County resident since the 1960s, raising his family in Menomonee Falls. In 2003, after receiving the Ford C. Frick award given to broadcasters in the Baseball Hall of Fame, he told The Freeman he’d passed up offers to apply his craft elsewhere over the years.

“It’s my home. There is nothing other than that,” he said. “I have no thoughts of leaving. It’s a nice area and it’s where I raised my kids. It’s home.”

Waukesha County Executive Paul Farrow paid tribute to the longtime county resident in a statement:

“I am deeply saddened to learn about the passing of ‘Mr. Baseball’ Bob Uecker; a cherished voice in the world of baseball and a beloved figure in our community,” Farrow said. “Through his quick wit, humor and knowledge of the game, Uecker had the unique ability to bring Brewers fans and baseball followers nationwide together. He created unforgettable memories for all of us who love the game. Thanks Ueck!”

Major League Baseball through its website released statements related to Uecker’s passing. The Milwaukee Brewers



Submitted photo

Waukesha County Executive Paul Farrow holds a bobblehead featuring Bob Uecker in his famous role as broadcaster Harry Doyle from the “Major League” films. Farrow said Uecker, a longtime county resident, employed humor and knowledge of the game to help Milwaukee Brewers and baseball fans around the world create indelible memories.

announced his passing as “the heaviest of burdens.”

“Ueck was the light of the Brewers, the soundtrack of our summers, the laughter in our hearts, and his passing is a profound loss. He was the heart and soul of Wisconsin and a dear friend. Bob loved people; his presence warmed every room and he had a way of welcoming all of us into his world as if we were lifelong friends.

“Saying goodbye to Bob shakes us all. He was so much more than a Milwaukee Brewers icon. He was a national treasure. Bob entertained us with his words and storytelling, so it is no surprise that his passing now leaves us at a loss for our own words.

“There is no describing the impact Ueck had on so many, and no words for how much he was loved. We are left with a giant void in our hearts, but also remember the laughter and joy he brought to our lives

throughout the years.”

MLB.com also posted a statement from baseball Commissioner Emeritus and former Brewers owner Allan H. “Bud” Selig that said:

“I am heartbroken with the loss of my dear lifelong friend, Bob Uecker. I can’t begin to describe how much he meant to me, let alone what this loss is for Brewers fans, the state of Wisconsin and countless others worldwide.

“Bob had the easiest way of making others feel at ease, share a laugh and always left people feeling a little better. Nobody was his equal.

“I am so grateful that Bob’s friendship was a constant presence throughout most of my life. For over fifty years, rarely did a day pass where we missed a conversation, a sharing of stories, and countless laughs. That cannot be replaced and is a giant loss, but I am lucky to have experienced that kind of enduring friendship.

“Sue and I are thinking of Judy, Bob’s children Sue Ann and Bob Jr., and all of Bob’s family during what is a difficult time for all of us.”

MLB.com also posted a statement from the Uecker family:

“It is with heavy hearts that we mourn the passing of Bob. To many, he was an announcer and entertainer whose humor and voice transcended the game, but to us he was so much more.

“Bob faced a private battle with small cell lung cancer since early 2023, which he met with the same strength and resilience that defined him. Even in the face of this challenge, his enthusiasm for life was always present, never allowing his spirit to falter.

“He brought joy to countless listeners through his wit, charisma, and love for baseball, Milwaukee, and all of Wisconsin, creating a legacy that will forever be cherished. While his contributions to the game are noteworthy, it is his kindness, humility, and love for family and friends that we will hold closest to our hearts.

“We are grateful for the outpouring of love and support during this difficult time as we grieve and celebrate the man we were so lucky to call ours.”

Details of a public celebration of Uecker’s life will be released by the Brewers at a later date.

Kraemer and Weiberg said Uecker’s passing leaves a void that will be hard to fill. Weiberg said he’s listened to enough out-of-market baseball games to know that the other members of the Brewers’ broadcast teams compare very well to counterparts across the sport and fans are lucky to have them. Kraemer agreed.

“They have some good announcers but there’s no replacing him, no question,” he said.

Elmbrook School District adding school resource officers

2 officers will be assigned to after-school activities

By Katherine Beck
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BROOKFIELD — Safety remains a top priority in the Elmbrook School District, and as a result, the district is adding two school resource officers to its high schools.

Superintendent Mark Hansen said the two officers will be focused on after-school activities, which is an area deemed to be in need of a strong presence after analyzing

safety protocols.

“The two additional SROs will be deployed at our high schools where we have thousands of people involved in events every single day,” Hansen said. “Our schools are very busy places during the school day. Many of our schools are also very busy places after school. The Board of Education prioritized finding a solution to after-school concerns and partnered with the City of Brookfield Police Department to

make this solution possible. Additionally, we partnered with Secure Resources Unlimited to provide an immediate response to these concerns.”

The Brookfield Common Council approved additional funding for the two positions during its meeting Jan. 14. The city’s general fund budget had to be amended to adjust for the SRO salaries and benefits for a total of \$325,154, which will be reimbursed to the city by Elmbrook School District, according to the council-approved resolution.

One SRO will be allocated to each Brookfield Central and Brookfield East high schools.

According to a memo from Brookfield Director of Finance and Administration Robert Scott, the council approved an amendment with the Elmbrook School District during its Jan. 7 meeting, but the salary and related expenditures “were not contemplated in the 2025 budget as adopted by the council. To maintain the staffing level of the police department exclusive of the SRO, additional officers will need to

be hired to replace those assigned as additional SRO.”

SROs were added to the school district in 2020, when officers were first assigned to Brookfield Central and Brookfield East. In 2022, the program was expanded to Pilgrim Park and Wisconsin Hills middle schools.

The officers help to build “positive relationships between law enforcement and the student body, as well as providing an added sense of security throughout the school day,” according to the district’s website.

Elmbrook School Board member Linda Boucher dies

Boucher served on the board for nine years

By Karen Pilarski
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BROOKFIELD — A moment of silence was requested at the Jan. 14 Elmbrook School Board meeting in memory of longtime board member Linda Boucher, who died unexpectedly on Jan. 12. Some flowers were placed where she would sit during board meetings. During the meeting, board member Kathy Lim read a statement from Boucher’s family.

“Linda led a rich and principled life, which, in addition to loving her God, husband, family, friends and community, was greatly focused on serving others through her education profession, she used the blessing and accomplishment of her bachelor’s and master’s degree in education, as well as her PhD level coursework to serve her community as a teacher in many area districts, including Kenosha, Milwaukee and Elmbrook, and for the past nine years as a dedicated member of the Board of Education,” the statement said.

“Throughout her career, she

took great joy in teaching, working with and being a tireless supporter who advocated for the parents of and children with special needs in her community. She spent many happy hours with these students at their dances and graduations, and loved them dearly,” the statement said.

The family, in the statement, highlighted Boucher’s vote for the refurbishment and the remodel of Fairview South Elementary School. The family described it as “a very unique, highly effective school” for students with special needs.

“It was her hope that with this board action, the Fairview South program would continue to set the bar for the years to come. Linda now joins her beloved husband in the eternal life promise to her and to all believers in Jesus Christ, our family thanks you for your warm wishes, but asks for privacy at this time until services, which are currently being planned, are announced, we would appreciate if you would reserve your comments for those Memorial opportunities, rather than tonight,” the statement said.

The family requests those wishing to make memorials to consider making them to Friends of Fairview South.

Scott Wheeler, board president, said Boucher was in her ninth year of service.

Lim and Boucher had given advance notice that they did not intend to be candidates for reelection to their seats in April.

Wheeler said Boucher was a lifelong educator supporting students with disabilities and as a special education educator for most of her teaching career. She received her Bachelor of Education Degree from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater with a dual certification in elementary education and special education. Later, she completed her master’s degree in special education and her Administrator and Director of Special Education certificates, also at UW-Whitewater.

“Linda was a passionate advocate for all students and often leveraged her experience in education to ground her beliefs, passions and interests that she served on the school board as a member of the Board of Educa-



Boucher

tion,” he said.

Linda served in several capacities, including board clerk, chairperson of the community and legislative committee, and a member of various other committees, and as a representative delegate to the Wisconsin School Board convention.

“No matter the topic, Linda asked for clear and transparent communication so that the public could engage in the board’s decision-making process,” Wheeler said.

During her tenure, the Board of Education invested over \$60 million toward capital improvement projects across the district and successfully navigated a pandemic. She provided families choice in their students’ learning pathways. In particular, she was a strong supporter of the district’s efforts to renovate its libraries, and she demonstrated her commitment to literacy by attending many of the author visits hosted by the district each year.

“She was very proud of her service to the Elmbrook community as a member of the Board of Edu-

cation as she will be greatly missed,” Wheeler said. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Bouchers.

On Jan. 15, the district sent out a statement announcing her death.

“I have had the privilege of working with Linda over the past nine years. Her commitment to the Elmbrook community is reflected in both her service and in her advocacy for all students,” said Wheeler. “Linda was always willing to listen to different perspectives on issues at hand, but her true north was guided by her experience in education and passion for supporting the needs of students with disabilities and their families.”

Elmbrook Superintendent Mark Hansen said, “My work with Linda was always grounded in our shared commitment to service in education. As lifelong educators, I was always impressed with Linda’s willingness to find a way to serve students and families’ educational needs after her teaching career was complete. I am grateful for her work on behalf of the Elmbrook Community as a member of our Board of Education.”

Brookfield council OKs \$6 million referendum for April ballot

Service, staff cuts possible without additional revenue, city says

By Brian Huber
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BROOKFIELD — Voters in the city of Brookfield will be asked in the spring election whether to approve a referendum that would allow the city to exceed state tax limits by \$6 million a year to avoid a projected shortfall going forward.

The Brookfield Common Council on Jan. 14 unanimously approved a resolution directing city staff to submit the referendum question to the Waukesha County Clerk’s Office for inclusion on the April 1 ballot. The only discussion in the Jan. 14 meeting was whether there was flexibility in the language of the resolution itself.

The city is expecting tax levy revenue shortfalls of \$4 million in 2026 that would rise to \$11 million by 2032 in the absence of such a referendum question, according to documents presented to the council in December. Mayor Steve Ponto pre-

viously told The Freeman that state law sets limits on municipal tax levy increases that are tied to an amount of new construction. Recent inflation adds to the financial pressures. Ponto previously said without additional revenue, the city won’t be able to continue its services at the same level. He said it’s the same mix of conditions that led the county last year to consider implementing a sales tax; that idea was pulled from the agenda hours before the County Board gathered to vote on the proposal.

Ponto also previously said the city has reserves that could cover the first year of a projected shortfall but was looking for a longer-term approach to address a growing financial gap.

After entertaining a variety of options for a referendum amount, as well as other possible solutions, the Finance Committee recommended a referendum of \$8 million, but aldermen trimmed that

figure in December to \$6 million in the hopes it would increase the chances that voters would pass it. A referendum of \$6 million sees the city having a surplus of \$2 million in 2026 that falls to a deficit by 2028, then a shortfall of about \$5 million by 2032, according to documents provided to the council. City Director of Finance and Administration Robert Scott told aldermen last month that a \$6 million referendum would address city finances into 2029, with some room for spending money on pavement work and paying down city debt, which could help people’s tax bills.

On Jan. 14, the council endorsed the \$6 million option, formally authorizing city staff to submit to the county clerk a referendum question saying, “Under state law, the increase in the levy of the City of Brookfield for the tax to be imposed for the next fiscal year, 2026, is limited to 1.016%, which results in a levy of \$43,536,841.

Shall the City of Brookfield be allowed to exceed this limit and increase the levy for the next fiscal year, 2026, for the purpose of maintaining City service levels, including police, fire, and emergency medical services staffing, road maintenance, and quality of life amenities, by a total of 13.781%, which results in a levy of \$49,536,841, and on an ongoing basis, include the increase of \$6,000,000 for each fiscal year going forward?”

According to a city analysis, if a \$6 million referendum is approved, it would add \$298 to the city tax bill for the owner of a \$460,000 home.

Scott said in a press release, “The need for a solution in the City of Brookfield is imminent,” mentioning that grant money funding nine city firefighter positions runs out in May. He told The Freeman on Jan. 15 that without such a referendum, “Quite frankly the city will have to make difficult decisions

about what service or staffing changes might be needed across departments to reduce the budget gaps or if there are alternative funding sources that will be reconsidered or implemented.”

Scott said the referendum question has been submitted to the county clerk’s office, which has affirmed its receipt of same.

He said the “number of comments the mayor’s office has received you could count on one hand,” which is a sign there may not be a great deal of awareness among residents. That’s part of the reason the city is working with a consultant to get information to residents about the referendum.

“The council has made a decision to put the question on ballot and over the coming weeks we will be providing materials to the community so they understand the reasons why this is being asked so they can make an informed decision when they go to the polls,” Scott said.

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Woman cited after car strikes building near Brookfield Square

BROOKFIELD — A 50-year-old Milwaukee woman has been cited after her car struck a building near Brookfield Square early Jan. 10.

Brookfield police received a report of a car striking a building along Moorland Road at Brookfield Square Drive at about 4:50 a.m. Jan. 10. The southbound car apparently left the roadway and struck a building on its southwest corner, police said.

Brookfield Assistant Police Chief Chris Garcia said there was no indication that intoxicated or reckless driving was involved.

The vehicle was occupied by the driver, a 50-year-old



Brian Huber/Freeman Staff

A building near Brookfield Square was struck by a car early Jan. 10. No one was seriously injured; however, police said a 5-year-old child was taken to a hospital as a precaution. The woman driving the car has been cited.

Milwaukee woman, and a 5-year-old child. The child was transported to an area hospital for a medical evaluation but the child's injuries were not considered serious or life-threatening, a police press release said.

The driver has been issued traffic citations for failure to keep vehicle under control, violation of child safety restraints and for operating a vehicle without insurance.

Ex-County Board chairman in California during fires

Decker's brother has covered earthquakes and wildfires as a TV cameraman

By Karen Pilarski
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HARTLAND — Former Waukesha County Board Chairman Paul Decker is seeing firsthand what is happening in the Los Angeles area as a result of the fires ravaging the area. He and his family are visiting his brother Patrick Decker in the Simi Valley area.

"On (Jan. 6) we played a golf game, and it was really nice. Overnight the winds picked up and by 11 on (Jan. 7) the fires started. It has been an unbelievable 24 hours," Decker said.

The fires are raging to the south of where Decker is staying. While they are safe, they can feel the gusty winds.

"There was major gusts and things blowing around," he said.

Santa Ana winds are created by high pressure over the Great Basin.

"It was very bad. It was very windy all day. They couldn't get the air equipment up which is what really harmed the ability to fight these fires," Decker said.

Many of the fires that began Jan. 7 were impacted by the powerful Santa Ana winds, which were more than 70 mph in some spots. The winds lessened Jan. 9, which was seen as helpful in the early days of the still-devastating blazes, but the National Weather Service warned that even the reduced winds could still spread fire rapidly.

"Because it is local and reporters are on the ground, we have seen things. They are interviewing people whose neighborhoods are all gone. You feel for those people who have lost so much that they built over the time they have been here," he said.

It has been very dry, and the area hasn't had rain in months.

"You can see everything, the lawns and trees, they are all very dry. When these sparks fly, the fires ignite and send off these embers. It hits a tree or sage brushes and boom. They turn into flames relatively quickly," he said.

Paul's brother Patrick lived in the area for 60 years and has been through a lot such as earthquakes, windstorms and fire. He was a cameraman at a Los Angeles area television station. Recently there was a fire 10 miles from where he lives.

"We always fear when an ember starts or however it happens, you are at the mercy of the winds. That fire continued all the way through farmland and went to Camarillo. It destroyed 75 homes. Embers can fly like a mile," Patrick Decker said.

He explained how these types of wildfires can't be fought with hoses and need to be battled through drops from a DC 9 aircraft or helicopter that can get water from local reservoirs.

"You can't pour water on it; the only way is from the air droppers from the planes. That is the only way you can put them out. I have seen this from above as a cameraman from a helicopter for the last

15 years," Patrick Decker said.

He has also witnessed mud slides such as the Montecito mudslides which devastated the area.

"Now you will see a lot of things that were burnt away, now when it starts raining there is nothing to hold it. Debris flows from the top of the mountain. That is what happened in Montecito," he said.

When he heard that the fire got to the Santa Monica mountains, which is south of Patrick, he told his brother and his wife that this was going to be the worst fire in Los Angeles history.

"There are so many homes that are built into the mountains. Everyone wants a view of the ocean. The winds were blowing south toward the ocean and then southeast. There were so many homes in the way. Once the embers started flying, they just set off everything. You can see the damage," Patrick said after the first full week of the fires.

The brothers are thinking of people impacted by fires including first responders.

"I feel bad for the first responders who are doing their best, but this is overwhelming plus running out of water in some fire hydrants. It's very worrying and

tough for people who must do this. People trying to save their homes ... it is very sad in many ways," Paul Decker said.

The FREEMAN

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