

Talks at GS
Russell Wilson
Denver Broncos Quarterback
Super Bowl XLVIII Champion
Founder, West2East Empire; House of LR&C
Nicole Pullen Ross, Moderator
Recorded: February 24, 2022

Russell Wilson: I'm a big believer in multiplication. How do you take a no and turn it into a yes? How do you add to your life when everybody else is saying no?

Nicole Pullen Ross: Welcome, everybody! We could not be more excited to be here. My name is Nicole Pullen Ross. I'm the partner in charge of our New York private wealth management business, and I also helped start our sports and entertainment business a few years ago. And we're thrilled to host today's conversation.

As I mentioned, given the quick turnout and the quick sellout when we announced this just two days ago, I know my guest needs no introduction. But I have to talk a little bit about him because there's so much we want to cover today.

So first, let me give you a little bit of background. So Russell has played for the Seahawks for ten years. He was the starting quarterback in two Super Bowls. Led his team to a victory when they defeated the Denver Broncos in 2014. He is a nine-time Pro Bowler. Holds the record for the most regular season wins by an NFL quarterback in his first ten seasons. He was named the Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year in 2020. Very impressive. And won the Bart Starr Award this year. Russ also has a diverse portfolio of businesses, which we'll get into a little bit

today, including clothing brands as well as a First Look deal with Amazon Studios.

We're going to talk about all of this. All things football, many business ventures, the impact that athletes have had on the movement for racial equity, and much, much more. But let's go back to what I assume is a pretty pivotal turning point for you. You'd left college to play in the Minor League Baseball. And you decided to return to school to play football. By that point, your coach had the view that you would likely not see the field, and that didn't deter you. So let's start by helping this team and my colleagues understand how you go from the biggest no in your career to such an extraordinary yes.

Russell Wilson: When I was coming out of high school, I was All-American. I like the jersey by the way. I was All-American in baseball in high school, but I had this itch to play football. I had this itch. I mean, I loved playing baseball. There's nothing better than hitting a home run. You don't even feel it. It's just, the ball is out of there. It's like you try to round the bases. But the thrill of having a football in your hands and making the play and third down is the keyest moment in the game. You throw a touchdown and get hit while doing it. That was always something special to me.

And so I had this fortunate situation to go to NC State to play both sports. I'm playing at NC State, playing both sports, taking 18 credits, doing all these things, making that promise to my dad, trying to fulfill all these goals and these missions and these visions. And they're also mine. And I'm doing well and everything else. And fast forward, my coach, I get drafted in baseball, June 8th, 2010. The next day, June 9th, 2010, my dad passes away. And he had the highest of the lows to the lowest of the low within

24 hours. Just like that, it's over.

And so in the time, in the moment, I always thought what am I going to do? Am I going to go play baseball? Am I going to play football? That was kind of the struggle at the time, to figure out what I was going to do. And April 27th - - this is an interesting story -- I'm playing in Rome, Georgia, at the time against the Atlanta Braves organization. I'm playing for the Colorado Rockies organization. And I'll never forget. I'm on the third floor at the Holiday Inn, okay? I go to the steps at 7:30 in the morning. I go out into the hallway to the stairs. I call my coach and I tell him, "Hey, listen, I want to come back to NC State. I want to play." And he tells me, "No, we're going to move on. You just go play baseball."

And I took that pretty heavy in that moment, but I also knew, I said, okay, you know, I want my transfer papers. I'm going to go pursue my dreams. And going back to the story where my dad said, "Hey, go graduate," at the time, there was a loophole that my agent Mark Rogers had found in the NCAA laws. That if a kid had graduated early, that he could go to whatever school he wanted to as long as he graduated within that 3-year period in a certain amount of time. So I was the first person. They call it really the Russell Wilson rule. You see all these guys transferring to all these schools now? Well, that's because of me.

And so it was a hard time in my life, but it was a devastating time but it was also a lot of goodness on the other side of it. And I think anytime you go through life and people tell you no, what I found out is how do I turn the noes into yeses? How do I multiply? I'm a big believer in multiplication. How do I enhance every opportunity to make it a good one and make it more? And so that's kind of how my life kind of spun.

And then just next thing I know, I'm up in Wisconsin. I'm like, Wisconsin? I'm from Virginia. Like, where's Wisconsin on the map? I didn't know. But anyway, it was the best six months of my life. I went there. Fast forward. We go win the Big 10 championship at Wisconsin. I'm balling out, doing my thing. And the rest of the guys, too. And it was an amazing experience. And if I had gone to another school, if I had been playing pro baseball, if I would have gone to -- I always wanted to go to University of Miami at the time. You know, I was younger. And so I wanted to play football and baseball there.

But if I had gone to Florida State or somewhere like that, the thing is that I wouldn't have been able to see my dad. So it's been a blessing. And I think that, like I said, I'm a big believer in multiplication. How do you take a no and turn it into a yes? How do you add to your life when everybody else is saying no?

Nicole Pullen Ross: I was reading this quote that someone wrote about you that talked about you as kind of this Houdini of technical quarterbacks. And he wrote, "Russell has a devastating arm that launches high-arching rainbow passes with surgical precision while simultaneously running for his life."

Russell Wilson: He's a poet. He's a poet.

Nicole Pullen Ross: Do you see yourself that way?

Russell Wilson: Do I see myself as Houdini? I don't know if I see myself as Houdini or not. But, you know, I think that God's given me a gift to throw a ball. He's given me big hands and the ability to throw the ball where I want it. I think a lot of it's taken a lot of practice. A lot of it's a

lot of gift. And a lot of it's just I'm a big believer in just seeing what I want to see.

For me, when I go, when it's game week and it's a big week and it's a massive game or whatever it is, to me, I'm visualizing constantly throughout practice. I'm visualizing constantly throughout my lifts, constantly thought every moment. I'm visualizing where the ball's going to go. And I think that a lot of that comes from playing a lot of baseball, a lot of sports. And I love to listen to people like Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant, Alan Iverson, one of the best point guards of all time. Talk about visualization.

Nicole Pullen Ross: Virginia.

Russell Wilson: Yeah, VA. And so for me, it was a lot of it was just a lot of practice and a lot of hard work. And I try to throw the ball to the moon and let it fall down, and that's kind of my thing. And you watch Seth Curry shoot baskets. It's like the ball goes way up there and just drops right on down. And I think it just gives you a better chance a lot of times if you know what you're doing.

Nicole Pullen Ross: Well, that's one of the things I was reading. That you take from basketball and baseball and that influences your game.

Russell Wilson: Yeah, I think baseball, you know, I posted a video on my Instagram the other day. It's like a lot of it's throwing at different arm angles and doing stuff. Because the game is never just pretty. The reality about football, I always say this. It's, like, if you guys have ever gone hunting, you guys ever been in the woods, anybody ever gone camping or anything like that? Anybody? Raise your hand?

Nicole Pullen Ross: This is a Northeastern crowd here. Not a lot of hunters.

Russell Wilson: But someone's gone camping around here, right?

Nicole Pullen Ross: Yes, camping.

Russell Wilson: You go camping, right? What's the number one thing you don't do? There's bears out there. What do you don't do? Yeah, you better be careful of that food, right? The football is the food. I got to get rid of the ham. It's like they're chasing after you, man. You got four, five, six, seven, eight sometimes bears chasing after you every play. You know? So you got to get rid of it. So that's a big part of it for me, is to know that everybody's coming at all different angles and you've got 2.3 seconds to get rid of the ball and see what you don't see and trust what you know. And that's why I study and being prepared. And that's why, in my opinion, it's the hardest position in sports because it's not just the physical part of it but it's also the mental part of it. And then it's putting a puzzle together. It's a massive puzzle you're putting together with all different moving pieces. And you don't know exactly what they're going to do, but you have an idea of what they do.

And so there's so many challenge along the way, and it's constantly moving.

Nicole Pullen Ross: One of the things that is so impressive, one of the many things about your career is how you think about how the underdog overcomes low expectations. In your own journey, you were underestimated early statistically, right? Deemed to be a better fifth for baseball. 75th pick in the NFL draft in

2012. But you've been on this journey to prove people wrong. Do you think that -- do you see yourself as kind of changing what it means to be a franchise quarterback? Because it has evolved.

Russell Wilson: Yeah, I think that's a great question. And I think that for me what's been so important to me is I don't ever look at myself as an underdog because I never viewed myself as an underdog. Right? I never viewed myself as an underdog. I always viewed myself as a champion, as a winner. I knew the process that I was going to give everything I had and have the great habits and allow myself to be able to win often. And I think that's what my mindset has always been. And I think they used to always ask me in interviews and stuff, "What do you think about your height?" So my height doesn't define my skill set. It doesn't define my skill set.

My skill set isn't just physically on the field. It's also up here. It's also in here. And so that was a big part of it for me. And I think when people watch me play and guys are in the huddle with me, they know I don't fear anything. I don't fear anything.

And I think also, too, the viewpoint of how tall a guy is and can he play, and I've always said that even if I'm 6' 2", you're not going to be throwing over top of these offensive linemen who are 6' 7". These guys are big guys, you know? So you're going through lanes. It's all about anticipation and visualization.

And so, yeah, so I think that's definitely been a big part of it for me, to be able to make a statement coming into the league. And that's been a key part of it.

Nicole Pullen Ross: How do you think about the

mindset? And how do you prepare your mind to go beyond the circumstances? I think the audience would appreciate hearing from you about --

Russell Wilson: Yeah, you know, I think that a critical part of my career so far has been one important person in my world. It's this guy named Trevor Moet [sp?] He was an amazing, amazing soul. Unfortunately, I lost him. We all lost him. He was a director of performance at IMG. I met him coming into the combine in 2012. And we clicked like the moment I walked into the room.

I would spend every morning, every lunch period, and every night with him for two hours before everybody got up or whatever it would be, and we would talk mindset and training. And I want to describe what my mindset is, and this is what we talk about limitless minds.

I'm a positive person by nature. I think you guys can probably tell that I'm a positive person, right? I'm not -- you know? But the thing about positivity is, when you're down 16 and it's the NFC championship game, you're losing to the Packers, and the day's not going great. And the ball's bouncing everywhere and it's not going your way, and you only got about two minutes and thirty seconds to go, it's really hard to be positive, okay?

The thing is that our natural instinct is to be negative. That's what we naturally do. It's the natural, normal thing to do, is to be negative. And the thing is that, yes, positivity we know definitely works, but what we know works 100% of the time is negativity. 100% of the time, it always works. And so what Trevor and I and my brother Harry, who's the CEO, and DJ, who's one of our partners, we formed was this company called Limitless Minds. And what we focus on is this thought process that neutrality is

actually the number one way. We talk about neutral thinking.

What we talk about is the greatest performers in the world, when there's chaos and there's the bears coming and everybody's flying after you and the world's going on and there's trouble and there's things and maybe the quarter wasn't the best or whatever it is that we're going through, family may be going through a struggle, how do you keep winning? How do you keep being successful over and over again?

And so what we talk about is that idea of neutral thinking. Let's just say I'm a great free throw shooter, okay? I shoot 96% from the free throw line, and I miss one. The game's on the line, okay? I miss one. I still got two. I could easily go into that mindset of, "Oh, I suck. What am I doing? All these people." And you can listen to the noise and the claps and all that stuff. Or you can retrain yourself mind to, "I'm a 96% free throw shooter. That's the truth." Boom. And I make the next one, right?

To me, neutral thinking is really about the truth and really to transform the truth into success and transform the truth into your next opportunity, into the moment. And so negative thinkers think about the past, and they think about the future. Neutral thinkers think about right now. And I think that is the difference between winners and the people who are able to overcome over and over and over again to get to this level where it's a different stratosphere. There's eight billion people in the world, and what do we all have? We all have this. How do we think? We're all going to face troubles and adversity. And one of the things that we talk about is adversity talents.

And the best people, I want people around me that have

adversity talents. When stuff is hard, how do they react? And to me, that's by your emotions, that's by your words and what you say and how you are. And to me, that's what winning is. And I think that's hard to capture because, once again, it's natural to be negative.

Nicole Pullen Ross: One of the things you said is that you want to be the best to ever play this game, to do what's never been done, and the only one to ever do it. I mean, many of us would say, "Okay, check," for you. You've done that. Is there a gap? Is there something left?

Russell Wilson: Oh, there's a lot left. A whole lot left. I think that why would I think any other way? I've been fortunate along the way to win a lot of games, to do a lot of amazing things. And I went to the Super Bowl the other day. We got to watch, me and Ciara, we were in the SoFi Stadium. Pretty nice stadium. And we were there. I leaned over to Ci, and we were talking a little bit. And, like, why can't you win five in a row? Why not? Why is it impossible? Like, is it? Why is it impossible to get on a hot streak and just keep going? I don't know. It's kind of the foundation of everything that I believe in is, you know, why not me? Why not you? Why not us?

And so that's been a lot of the thought process that I've had along the journey. I think I work my tail off 24/7 around it, and that's all I think about is the next opportunity to be successful. And so, yeah, I mean, I think for me, I just stay focused on the moment, though. I think that the balance of you having these dreams and these goals and all that and understanding how do you get there? Well, how do I get there is I just want to be really dang good today. And I just want to be really, really successful today. And if I can put my feet right where they are and be 100% in that moment, I know the good stuff's coming. I know all the

other things are going to happen just because it has to. It always has. And so why would I think any other way?

Nicole Pullen Ross: Okay, let's talk about risk management. And I go back to the decision you made to reject that contract at a very young age for a shot at football, right? Was that confidence? Was that passion? How did you think about the risk?

Russell Wilson: So for me, I think a lot of times in my life, every five, ten years there's a moment in time where you have to make decisions, I feel like. And sometimes it's sooner than that, but I feel like there's these moments in time. And baseball, when I was sitting in Asheville, North Carolina, in the basement of these family's home, I was playing pro baseball as a Minor Leaguer, it was, like, you're not making much. You're making, I don't know, \$1,800 a month playing pro baseball. It's a challenging thing. But I knew that I could get to the big leagues.

And so for me, making the decision do I leave something that everybody's telling me that I could be one of the best in the world at? Or do I do something, take the risk of where everybody's saying, "There's no way you're going to make it"? And I'll never forget praying that night. I was in the car. I was kind of tearing up. And I had just hit a home run and played really well. And I had been struggling a little bit before that, and I was catching fire. And the scouting director, the GM, everybody came out to come see me play and for a week and a half because they were trying to convince me to stay and play baseball.

And it was probably the hardest decision in my life because everybody's telling me, "This is what's for you. This is what's for you. This is good for you. This is where you're going to be." And at the same time, I felt in my spirit that

God had something different for me. And that was really a challenging moment, speaking about risk. I want leave something that's on the other end, and the other end saying there's no way.

I said, you know what? I will never forget waking up. It was June 27th. I woke up that morning. And I had said a prayer the night before in my car. I said I was crying in my car. And I said, "God, just reveal it to me." I woke up the next morning. It was 5:15 in the morning, and God says, "I want you to be uncommon." And I'm, like, that tells me my answer. "I want you to do the thing that everybody's saying that you can't."

And that's where I think for me, spiritually, that was a key moment for me. That I understand that risk taking, as long as you're passionate about it and as long as you have this deeper meaning for it, is actually sometimes the best thing to do. And so for me, that was what I've always understood, and that's what I've always believed in. And you take an educated risk. But sometimes you take risks that are bigger than that, and I think that's where you find the gold on the other side of it.

Nicole Pullen Ross: Great. Thank you. So let's talk about you as the businessman.

Russell Wilson: Okay.

Nicole Pullen Ross: As I understand it, you've lawyers kind of thought about the bigger picture, and you've managed your brand from the very early stage. You have a production company, as we talked about, the First Look deal with Amazon. Multiple fashion brands. Mental coaching company for executives. Endorsements. Partnerships. Nike, Bose, others. How did that happen?

Was there an event? How did you start with this mentality that you wanted your brand, your legacy, your experience to go beyond?

Russell Wilson: April 27th, 2012, is the day I got drafted by the Seattle Seahawks. Coach Carroll says, “Hey, you're going to be our franchise quarterback,” this and that. “You're going to be the guy.” That Wednesday, okay, I get an invoice, okay, from -- I'm not going to say the company. I get an invoice from this marketing company I was working with. And the invoice is for \$40,000-some. Now, I'm only making \$350,000 that year. Okay, that's not after taxes. Okay? That's before taxes, okay? So there's all this going on. And \$40,000, I'm scratching my head trying to do the math. I'm, like, wait, hold on, how is this possible? Like, I just got started two days ago.

And what I realized is that they were copying and pasting somebody else's work and putting it into mine, said, “This is what we're doing,” 40 hours. And I'm like, “This is wrong.” So I fired them right away. And that's when I said, you know what? I'm putting my business hat on. My dad went to Dartmouth. My family was from educators and everything else. And my dad went to UVA Law School and my mom went to UVA, too. I was, like, I'm going to make sure that I own my space. And I'm going to be great.

I'd already set that in my mind. People didn't know, but I knew. So I'm going to be great, so I'm going to map make what I'm going to do. As you're a rookie, you go to this thing called the Rookie Symposium. It's kind of like this. We're all rookies in here. And this guy walks onto the stage. The first meeting you have in the NFL. A guy walks on the stage, and he walks across and he says, “What does the NFL stand for?” We're like, “National Football League of course.” And he goes, “No, it stands for Not For Long.”

And he says, "Start thinking about Plan B now." That's the first thing he says. It's the first, like, interaction we have in the NFL.

And I'd already been thinking about Plan A. I don't think about Plan B. My Plan A was I was going to be successful. And my Plan A was that I was going to make a lot of money and have a lot of fun while doing it, and that was my plan. And so I was already in that mindset. And so for me, I was, like, okay, you know what? I want to own my space.

And so what I did was I created a company called West to East. I got in my Bible and I was reading how God's love is for us from the east to the west. And so I looked that up. Well, somebody took that, so I was, like, let me flip it. So that's how it became West to East. And so I said, you know what? If I'm going to shoot these Nike commercials, if I'm going to shoot Bose, if I'm going to do all this stuff, I want to be able to monopolize my opportunities because they were hiring these BTS companies and all these crews to shoot this. I'm, like, well, why don't we just do it ourselves? And then I'm making money from Nike, but I'm also doing it another way.

So that was kind of the thought process of it, I'm going to do it. And then what it really became and it really became my think tank. And so now what we've been able to do, we've been able to create obviously West to East as a think tank. Okay? But we've been able to create the House of LRNC, which is our fashion house. So underneath that is the Good Man brand, which is our clothing line, okay? And so we have that.

And how I thought of it was the thought process around it was that, you know, I think every guy -- and we have that 3-point range where we can wear a blue blazer, you know,

a white shirt and tie and a blue tie and nice shoes. And no matter how tall we are, we got hair, no hair, how big we are, whatever it is, like, we can look handsome. We can look pretty good.

And then there's the layup line, okay? And I'm using my sports analogy because obviously I love sports and I wish I could play basketball. But the layup line is where you're wearing the Nike pair of shorts, Nike shoes, Nike t-shirt, boom, okay, you go to the mall, you look good, you know? What's up, man? You go to the gym, whatever it is.

Okay, but then, okay, every great scorer has a mid-range game. And I felt like the mid-range game wasn't there. And I didn't have it, and I needed it. And so I was, like, if I'm going to date a girl way out of my league, I said, I needed a great mid-range game. And so that's why we built Good Man brand. It's been kicking butt ever since. The Good Man brand's been rocking. The thing about me and Ci that I love every day is, number one, I get to wake up next to her every day, and we get to say our prayers every day and all that and have these three beautiful kids. But I think the best part, too, is that we don't get sick of each other. Like, we love doing everything together.

Like, I mean, like, if she could come on the football field and run a slant route, she would. And the thing is she could, right? Like, she's got them dancing feet. You know, boom, break inside, catch a slant, take it to the house. But I'm not getting on stage. The only stage I'll be on is hopefully the Lombardi Stage and --

Nicole Pullen Ross: Yes.

Russell Wilson: So that's the only stage I'm getting on. I'm staying in my lane. But the cool part about me and Ci

is that we get to do life together, build businesses together. We have a fragrance, too. I mean, we have our date nights where we're smelling fragrance and doing fun stuff and just hanging out, you know?

I think that to be able to do life with somebody every day -- and I think that a lot of times in the celebrity space, to be honest with you, there's a separation of things? I think that we really say, you know what? Like, let's join in everything that we're doing. Let's make it really amazing. Sports and music, the two most entertaining things in the world. And you add fashion to that. Like, what a blessing it is to do life with you every day.

Yeah, so it's a gift, you know?

Nicole Pullen Ross: You talked about your dad. And we've heard about the impact that he's had. He asked you a really important question when you were six years old that has been part of the guiding principle for you as you think about community and giving. Can you share that question and what that's led to?

Russell Wilson: Yeah, that, "Why not you?" question. That was a fundamental question. My dad used to always ask me. And it was a subconscious/conscious question that he always asked me. And for me, when my dad used to always ask me that, he was, like, "Why not you be great? Why don't you graduate early? Why not you be play two sports? Why not you be a great business leader? Why not you? Why not you? Why not you?"

And I think that no matter what we go through in life, that's the conscious and subconscious question we all have to ask ourselves. And whether we've asked it before, asking it now, or we're going to ask it, we're going to ask

that question over and over and over again. And I think that was the thing that really was a driving force. Ciara says that best. We've created a foundation called the Why Not You Foundation. It was originally, and our thought process was the Russell Wilson. I was, like, I don't want to name it. Let's name it the Why Not You Foundation. So that's been an amazing journey. And Ciara always says it's best to live with a "Why not you?" attitude and to teach kids and to give them that YOU also stands for youth. We're really heavily focused on the youth and to be able to impact the youth. We focus obviously on health and wellness. And pediatric cancer has been something that we've invested in such an amazing way and have had amazing partners along the way.

And then also, too, as well obviously poverty has been a big part of it. We've partnered up with Feeding America and doing some amazing things around that during COVID and just seeing so many people just lose their jobs and just go through just so much turmoil. That was important for us to be able to donate to that and make a big splash in that way, I think. And I'll never forget Kenny Dicker, the CEO of Wheels Up, called me and said, "How can we do something?" Let's meals up, wheels up, let's do it. And that's what we started doing. And it's been, I don't even know, probably 70-plus million meals and that's been amazing.

So I think that for us, with Why Not You Foundation, one of the things that me and Ciara have been super passionate about is education, too. And so what we were able to do with the first date that we had, the first time we ever hung out, I said, you know, I'm a bold question guy. I'm sure you guys can tell a little bit. And so I was, like, "So what do you want to do? What's your big goals?" And she was asking me the same kind of questions. And one of

the things that we talked about is opening up a school one day, how important that would be to open up a school. We talked about books and to be able to write a children's book one day.

And so we opened up a school, Why Not You Academy out in Seattle. It's a charter school. It's been so amazing just to see kids' faces all over and to be able to understand that kids are getting an amazing opportunity. That's been amazing just to see kids reach their dreams. And the other part of that is we're about to launch our new children's book, our first children's book. So that's going to be really cool. It's called *Why Not You?* And it's exciting.

And so everything goes from that. And everything that we do from a business standpoint and community standpoint goes back to the Why Not You Foundation. And we donate all those proceeds to the kids. So every time somebody buys a Good Man pair of pants or a jacket or pair of shoes, 3% goes back to -- obviously number three, great number -- 3% goes back to the Why Not You Foundation. And then we donate all those proceeds, for example, to the Friends of the Children. And Friends of the Children is a mentorship program. So we're really heavily, heavily focused on the youth and how can we improve the next generation. And that's our obsession. That's what we really care about, and that's what we're passionate about.

Nicole Pullen Ross: Awesome.

Russell Wilson: What's so important in what you've been able to do over your years -- you said 22 years? And 22 years is very special. You know, to think about what you've been able to accomplish over 22 years. But what's more important is what you're about to accomplish and what you're about to accomplish with everyone who's in

this room. And I think what's so impressive is to know that there's still so much opportunity to impact and change.

And so whatever Ciara and I can do to be a part of this journey with Goldman Sachs and with everybody in this room and everybody's dreams and goals, that's what we want to be a part of.

Nicole Pullen Ross: Thank you.

Russell Wilson: And we want to be a part of people that and companies and places that really want to challenge the fact that we can be better. We can go further. We can go higher. And so it's exciting to be a part of that. And so I just appreciate you being on stage with me. I get to be around the [UNINTEL] look and to be up here with you. And what an honor it is, honestly, to share the stage with you. And I'm grateful that I get to be up here. And know that there's so much more ahead. I really believe the best is ahead, and I'm grateful for you allowing that journey to there for everyone. So just grateful for you.

Nicole Pullen Ross: Thank you. Thank you for sharing.

Russell Wilson: Thank you, Goldman Sachs. Thanks.

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