

INSIDE TODAY

Norma McCorvey, history's 'Jane Roe,' has died at 69
State, 8A



INSIDE BUSINESS

Denton Air Show on hiatus for 2017
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INSIDE SPORTS

Mean Green shine after meeting one of UNT's best teams
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Denton Record-Chronicle

Home tax breaks done many ways

Denton County cities handle property tax exemptions differently

By Peggy Heinkel-Wolfe
Staff Writer
pheinkel-wolfe@dentonrc.com
Denton County's largest cities take different tacks when taxing single-fami-

Elections 2017
Proposed property tax freeze
ly homes, a *Denton Record-Chronicle* analysis has found.
The *Record-Chronicle* conducted the analysis in advance of the May 6 election, which challenges how Denton taxes single-family houses. Activists hope Denton city voters will agree to a proposition that gives another tax break

to homeowners with a disability or age 65 and older.
Single-family homes aren't the only properties taxed to pay for city services. Businesses, oil and gas wells, airplanes, some utilities and other personal property get taxed, too. But in public discussions, politicians and policymakers often focus on the individual homeowner's tax bill because it can be large. Homeowners write a check each year

totaling thousands of dollars, a payment divvied up between a county, a school district, a city and occasionally a special district (such as a fire or water district), too.
On the Denton tax rolls, the average house is worth \$195,882. Last year, the average homeowner paid \$4,842 in property taxes: \$487 to the county, \$3,017 to the school district, and \$1,338 to the city.

Exemptions
A property tax exemption removes part of a home's value, either a percentage or a fixed amount, from taxation. The practice to exempt some value is common among governmental entities but is not universal.
Homeowners in some area cities receive no exemption on their city property

See PROPERTY on 6A



Tomas Gonzalez/DRC

Jackson Weatherford was playing baseball for Guyer High School when a pitch struck him on the left side of his head. Post-concussion symptoms still trouble him nearly two years later. "I don't know if I remember what normal feels like," he says. "I just wish I could play baseball again."



BREAKING the CYCLE

Doctor says procedure reboots the brain after concussion

By Steve Gamel
Staff Writer
sgamel@dentonrc.com

Jackson Weatherford stares at every baseball field as if it were his home — a home, sadly, he may never go back to.
In May 2015, Weatherford, then a senior at Guyer High School, took a 90-mph fastball to the left side of his head during a playoff game. The blow was so powerful it sent his batting helmet flying as the ball rolled back toward the pitcher's mound. He

turned 180 degrees and, with his back now to the mound, began to collapse.
"I remember being in the [batter's] box and seeing the pitcher's leg come up," said Weatherford, who was caught by the home plate umpire. "The rest is fuzzy. It wasn't until the next day that I began piecing everything together. I asked my mom, 'So, can you fill me in?'"

Weatherford, now 19, suffered a severe concussion that day. Doctor's orders forced him to stay in a dark room for 11 days with limited contact with everyone close to him. He could never play baseball again, but he has moved on with his life and is a student equipment manager for the University of

See CONCUSSION on 6A

Hundreds may have bypassed voter ID

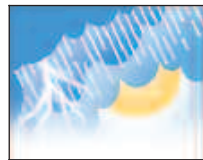
Some Texans cast ballots improperly, election officials say

By David Saleh Rauf
Associated Press

AUSTIN — Texas election officials have acknowledged that hundreds of people were allowed to bypass the state's toughest-in-the-nation voter ID law and improperly cast ballots in the November presidential election by signing a sworn statement instead of showing a photo ID.
The chief election officers in two of the state's largest counties are now considering whether to refer cases to local prosecutors for potential perjury charges or violations of election law. Officials in many other areas say they will simply let the mistakes go, citing widespread confusion among poll workers and voters.
The Texas law requires voters to show one of seven approved forms of identification to cast ballots. It was softened in August to allow people without a driver's license or other photo ID to sign an affidavit declaring that they have an impediment to obtaining required identification.
Even after the affidavits were introduced, voters who possess an acceptable photo ID were still required to show it at the polls.
The revelations come as President Donald Trump makes frequent claims that the nation's voting systems are vulnerable to fraud. The president has repeatedly said, without citing any evidence, that he would have won the popular vote if not for 3 million to 5 million immigrants in the country illegally who voted for his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton.
An Associated Press analysis of roughly 13,500 affidavits submitted in

See VOTER ID on 21A

TODAY IN DENTON



Mostly cloudy with a chance of storms by evening
High: 75
Low: 60
Three-day forecast, 2A



LOCAL

Area residents who enjoyed a sunny Saturday are in for a wet end to the weekend.

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FIND IT INSIDE

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NATIONAL



Survivors commemorate the 75th anniversary of the executive order authorizing the incarceration of Japanese-Americans.

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INTERNATIONAL

Investigators still are trying to piece together Kim Jong Nam's death.

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Talks promote ways to halt violence

Day's topics include domestic abuse, police interactions

By Matt Payne
Staff Writer
mpayne@dentonrc.com

Domestic violence Detective Elisa Howell remembers a case about a woman who tolerated routine, life-threatening abuse.
This woman started dating a man after moving to North Texas from Boston, but what started out as wonderful devolved into a nightmare. She was choked, nearly killed from

See VIOLENCE on 22A



Matt Payne/DRC

Deputy Police Chief Lenn Carter answers questions after discussing racial profiling Saturday afternoon. Denton police and the Denton County chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority presented a series of sessions titled "Stop the Violence."

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Concussion

North Texas football team. But to this day, there still are lingering post-concussion symptoms ranging from occasional dizziness to blurred vision, headaches and anxiety.

One local doctor says he has found a way to break the cycle of post-concussion symptoms thanks to a revolutionary device gaining traction in the medical community. If he's correct, athletes like Weatherford who have suffered significant brain trauma can have a new lease on life — even long after their playing days are over.

"I don't know if I remember what normal feels like," Weatherford said. "I just wish I could play baseball again."

The device is called the Sphenocath. Dr. Chad Stephens, the team doctor for Liberty Christian School in Argyle, is a sports and pain board-certified physician who specializes in interventional concussion management and migraine treatment. He originally took interest in the device as a quick, minimally invasive way to treat patients with chronic migraines.

The Sphenocath's success rate, he said, is 90 percent. A lot of people, including Weatherford, are candidates for the procedure. But they've never heard about it.

Around a year ago, Stephens began using the Sphenocath to treat patients who suffer from post-concussion symptoms — with similar success. Post-concussion symptoms can include everything Weatherford experiences as well as others, such as sleep problems, irritability, balance issues and loss of concentration and memory.

The procedure, which takes minutes to complete, uses a small catheter to deliver anesthetic through the nasal cavity to block a nerve complex just behind the nose. Those nerves long have been known to be a source of migraine pain, and by deadening those nerves, most patients feel immediate relief in as little as one visit.

Stephens said insurance companies cover the procedure, except for a separate fee for the device that he calls "very affordable."

For patients who have suffered brain trauma, it has a positive domino effect on post-concussion symptoms.

"Think of this procedure as if you were pushing the reset button on your



Tomas Gonzalez/DRC

Dr. Chad Stephens, president of Noble Pain Management and Sports Medicine, demonstrates on his assistant how a Sphenocath would be administered Friday in his Flower Mound office. Stephens has been using it to treat patients with post-concussion symptoms. The small catheter delivers lidocaine hydrochloride, an anesthetic, through the nasal cavity to block a nerve complex just behind the nose.

phone or computer," Stephens said. "You know how sometimes your phone starts malfunctioning — maybe you're pushing buttons and it's not responding as fast as it should? Well, in those cases what you do is turn it off, and when it comes back on, it works fine. It's the same with the Sphenocath. We're resetting the body's autonomic nervous system.

"For some concussion patients, that cloud that has been looming over them breaks up immediately. Others who have deeper issues, I continue to treat. But there are significant improvements."

The Sphenocath was created by Dolor Technologies, which is based in Salt Lake City. Over the past year, Stephens has aggressively pushed the

Sphenocath to athletes in all sports at all levels. He had a meeting with the National Football League Players Association about the device. He also recently returned from Dubai, where he spoke to multiple doctors from the Middle East about his innovative approach to migraine and concussion treatment.

Patrick Cobbs, a former UNT running back, played in the NFL and now is an assistant coach at Ryan High School. He hadn't heard of the Sphenocath when contacted by the *Denton Record-Chronicle*. But as a former player who has suffered concussions, he feels it's only a matter of time before professional athletes begin lining up.

"That would be phenomenal," Cobbs said. "I haven't heard of it, but

less pain is a good thing, and I can't imagine why you wouldn't try it. You hear about concussions all the time, and what people go through. It's scary."

For Stephens, using the Sphenocath is all about improving an athlete's overall quality of life.

"Notice how I haven't said this gets them back to the field faster. That's not the first goal," Stephens said. "We want to improve their quality of life. If you can stop a cycle of post-concussion symptoms earlier, it can be a game changer.

"The sky is the limit. Every time I see a player on TV go out with a concussion, I'm squirming because I know if I was there in the locker room, I could make things better for them."

'Look at what it did for me'

Madison Drenowatz is a sophomore at Carroll High School in Southlake and one of Stephens' patients. In February 2016, she suffered a concussion after taking a kick to the face during a high school soccer game.

That was the beginning of a wild journey that saw Drenowatz recover from her injury only to eventually fall ill and later be diagnosed with celiac disease, an immune disorder in which the body cannot tolerate gluten. She developed headaches and, after more complications, began experiencing concussion-related symptoms.

It was almost as if the soccer injury had just happened.

See **CONCUSSION** on 7A

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Property

taxes. For example, Flower Mound, Frisco and Lewisville grant exemptions only to homeowners who are older or disabled. Other area cities grant exemptions to other homeowners. In Carrollton, for example, the first 20 percent in value of an owner-occupied home is exempt from property taxes.

Local government bodies grant exemptions for different reasons, says Abraham Benavides, professor and chairman of the Public Administration Department at the University of North Texas.

"It depends on the makeup of a city council at the time the decision is made why they decided to grant an exemption or not," Benavides said.

For example, granting exemptions for those who live in their homes could be a way to encourage fewer rental — and more owner-occupied — homes. Denton and Carrollton have higher concentrations of rental homes than Flower Mound, Frisco and Lewisville. Some Denton City Council members have said in the past they would like to encourage more Denton homes to be owner-occupied.

Flower Mound, Frisco and Lewisville don't offer property tax exemptions simply because a home is owner-occupied. But Denton and Carrollton do. About 37 percent of Denton homes serve as rentals. Denton offers a 5 percent exemption, with a \$5,000 minimum, to those homes that are owner-occupied. In Carrollton, even more homes are rentals: 58 percent. Carrollton's 20 percent exemption translates into about \$34,000, on average, being exempted from taxation.

Hitting the bottom line

The differing exemptions among Denton County's five largest cities have varying effects on how much they collect from single-family homeowners.

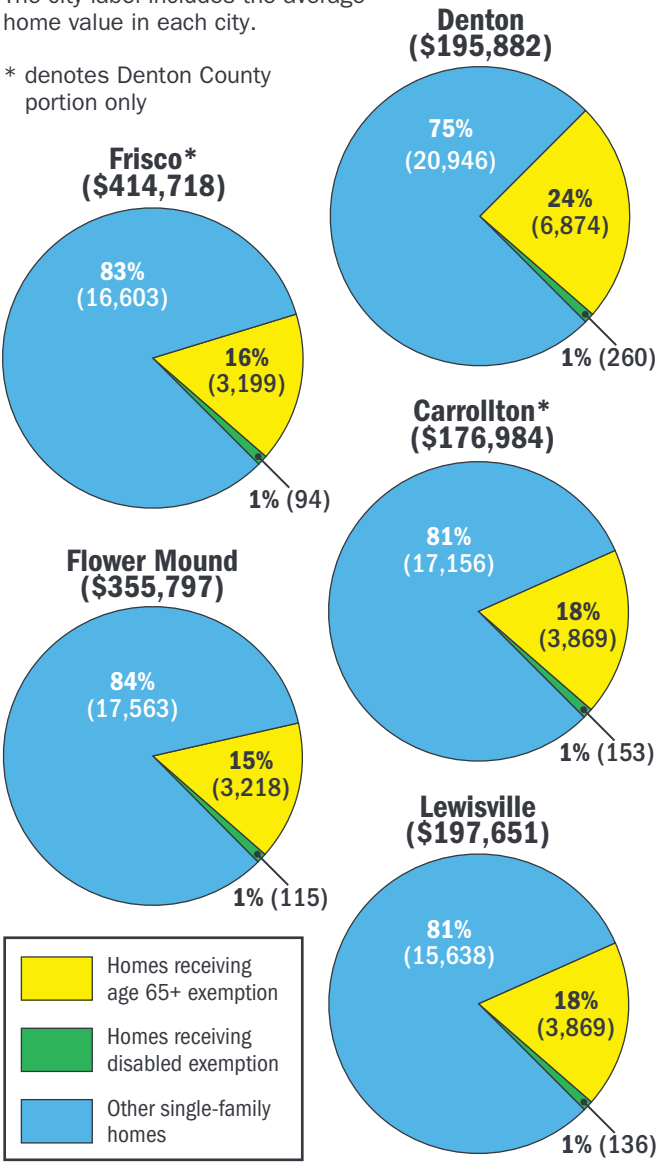
Of the five, Frisco has the largest tax base of single-family homes, about \$8 billion. Frisco also exempts the least from taxation, at 3 percent. Flower Mound exempts 4 percent of its

HOW THEY COMPARE

Each of these five cities in Denton County has about 20,000 single-family houses (Denton has about 28,000). Some of the homeowners have a disability or are age 65 or older. These pie charts compare the proportion of houses receiving those exemptions and those not.

The city label includes the average home value in each city.

* denotes Denton County portion only



Jason Lee/DRC

\$7 billion in taxable value from single-family homes.

Lower average home values in Denton and Lewisville give those two cities a smaller tax base from single-family homes to start with. In addition, the exemptions claim a greater percentage of that tax base. Lewisville exempts 5 percent of its \$3.7 billion in value from single-family homes from taxation. Denton exempts 8 percent of its \$5.1 billion in single-family homes from taxation.

Carrollton exempts the most: 20 percent, or about \$1 billion of its \$5 billion in tax value from single-family homes, is exempted from taxation.

Last year, all five cities raised between \$16 million and \$36 million in property taxes from the owners of single-family homes.

When taxes get regressive

Policymakers can also address the regressive nature of property taxes through exemptions to

TAX RATES

Compare below the tax base that comes from single-family homes in the five largest cities in Denton County, including how much value it has and about how much it brings to each city's general fund to pay for city services:

City	Number of single-family homes	Total value	Tax rate (cents per \$100 in value)	Taxes collected after exemptions (estimated)
Denton	28,080	\$5 billion	68.334	\$35 million
Carrollton*	21,178	\$5.2 billion	60.37	\$31 million
Flower Mound	20,896	\$7.4 billion	43.9	\$32 million
Frisco*	19,896	\$8.2 billion	45.0	\$37 million
Lewisville	19,174	\$3.7 billion	43.6086	\$16 million

*Denton County portion only

TAXES: PROGRESSIVE, REGRESSIVE, PROPORTIONAL

Taxes usually fit into one of three categories: progressive, regressive or proportional.

Social Security and **sales taxes** are **regressive taxes**. People with lower incomes use more of their earnings to pay those taxes while still paying for basic living expenses. People with higher incomes can pay the taxes, pay for basic living expenses and sometimes have money left to save or invest.

Income taxes often are considered **progressive taxes** because people with higher incomes typically pay a higher rate. The U.S. Treasury reports the wealthiest American families pay the equivalent of a 39 percent tax rate, while the poorest families have a negative tax rate. In other words, they receive more in tax credits than what they pay. However, the federal income tax code has exceptions that increase the perception that not everyone is paying their fair share. Progressive taxes aren't universally considered fair, but they are an integral part of most modern economies. Experts cannot agree whether **property taxes** are **progressive, regressive or proportional**.

Because property tax rates usually are higher in urban areas, where more services are needed, property taxes could be seen as **proportional**. When policymakers adopt homestead exemptions and lower the tax burden for modest homes, they can make a property tax more **progressive**. Also, because property is less equally distributed across the nation's population than income, property taxes could be considered even more progressive than income taxes, some economists say. But others argue property taxes can become **regressive**, like sales taxes, because low-income families must spend a higher proportion of their income on housing. And the burden can be exacerbated when some property owners get a tax abatement or freeze and the burden shifts to others.

SOURCE: Denton Record-Chronicle research and the Tax Foundation

homeowners, Benavides said.

A homeowner's ability to pay property taxes more closely matches the actual tax bill when they first buy a home. But as the years go by, particularly if that home increases in value, the property tax can become more regressive for that homeowner, he said.

"We're going to have some people, including elderly people on a fixed income, who may have less of an ability to pay," Benavides said.

That may be true for anyone living in a modest home, though it's more likely to happen to older people who have been in their homes for a while, he said. After all, the tax rate is the same for everyone — for people who just bought a home as well as people who have been in a home for decades.

All five of the county's largest cities offer some kind of property tax exemption to homeowners who are disabled or age 65 or older. Although Flower

Mound doesn't offer exemptions to a home simply because it is owner-occupied, the town gives large exemptions for seniors. Homeowners in Flower Mound can exempt \$100,000 of their home's value from taxation once they reach age 65.

Exemptions, plus a freeze

In addition to exemptions, Lewisville has a tax freeze for seniors and the disabled. About \$200 million in property taxes is exempted for those two groups of homeowners. The city has another \$383 million frozen off the tax rolls for them, too.

Here's how it works for the homeowner: When a homeowner turns 65 or becomes disabled (defined as qualified for Social Security disability benefits), they can freeze the dollar amount they pay in city property taxes. In other words, the amount they paid the year of the freeze becomes the dollar amount they pay each year for as long as they live in their home. They pay the same amount each year no matter whether the home increases in value or the city property tax rate goes up.

Denton activists hope voters will agree to a similar freeze for seniors and the disabled in May. They used a provision in state law to circulate a petition and get a proposition on the ballot.

The proposition will be part of a city election called for May 6. Early voting begins April 24. The deadline to register to vote in the May election is April 6.

PEGGY HEINKEL-WOLFE can be reached at 940-566-6881 and via Twitter at @phwolfeDRC.

From Page 6A

Concussion

“I was light-sensitive, sound-sensitive and I had headaches and pain across my face — exactly where I had been kicked,” Drenowatz said. “I stayed in a dark room for over a month. I basically couldn’t function as a human being.”

Drenowatz was referred to Stephens, whom she credits for her full recovery.

“By the time I saw him, I was skeptical and wondering,” she said. “But within hours I was feeling better.

“To anyone who may be skeptical about this, I just say, look at what it did for me.”

Cole Hardy, a football player at Liberty Christian, also was skeptical after he suffered a concussion in a dirt bike crash. He was alert, talking and answering questions immediately after the wreck, but he regressed over the next 30 minutes and became lethargic.

The first SpheenoCath procedure resolved almost all his symptoms. He returned to football shortly thereafter, but his headaches came back. A second procedure cleared everything up.

“Within 10 minutes, my headaches were gone,” Hardy said.

Both Drenowatz and Hardy have not had any concussion-like symptoms since.

One bad pitch

Unlike Drenowatz and Hardy, Weatherford didn’t have immediate access to an innovative procedure like the SpheenoCath. Therefore, his symptoms have lingered longer and created a more difficult cycle to break.

If you met Weatherford or simply saw him walking down the street, you would never know he suffers from occasional concussion-related issues. In fact, he prefers not to let on about them and leads a fairly normal life.

But he still gets headaches, and his vision can blur if he suffers a hit to the

“We’re resetting the body’s autonomic nervous system. For some concussion patients, that cloud that has been looming over them breaks up immediately.”

— Dr. Chad Stephens

left side of his head. He is sensitive to camera flashes, even from a phone, so taking a picture with friends sometimes can be jarring in dim light. As a precaution, he takes only the minimum hours of classes at school to keep from being overloaded.

All because of one bad pitch.

“They put me in the dugout [after the injury] and I was sitting there looking at the guy who was in left field. I kept saying to myself, ‘That should be me. I’m going to go play.’ I remember at the same time, my ear was really cold,” Weatherford said. “A teammate came up and asked how I was doing and I asked him why my ear was so cold. He said, ‘Dude, you’re holding an ice bag.’ I said, ‘No, I’m not. Oh, wait. I am.’ I don’t remember how I got to the hospital.”

Mike Weatherford, Jackson’s father and an assistant coach at Guyer, was there and felt helpless.

“The doctor told us that had the umpire not been able to catch Jackson before he hit the ground, he could have ended up in a coma or worse,” Mike Weatherford said. “He missed school, and while he went to graduation, we had to time it right so he wasn’t there for very long. The whole gym had to be quiet, and he wore earplugs and glasses.

“I was the parent, and I felt like a helpless child. I’d sleep outside his bedroom door just to be close to him.”

Like a slow-booting computer, Jackson Weatherford’s brain continued to recover.

“Each and every day was like its own mountain to climb,” Jackson said.

“Those 11 days, it was awful — going to

sleep and waking up in the dark not knowing which day it was. I was cut off from everything. I wanted to go to [graduation], and I was cleared by the doctor to do it, but just being out of the room for a little bit, the doctor compared it to having a scraped knee and continuing to scrape it against the concrete.

“That’s what I was essentially doing to my brain.”

Pivotal next steps

Now that he knows about the SpheenoCath, Weatherford said he would be open to the possibility of at least meeting with Stephens and having a conversation. Stephens is convinced the procedure can help.

“There is a very real chance it will benefit him,” Stephens said. “I’ve worked on some pretty challenging cases. I’m more than happy to try this.”

Meanwhile, Weatherford is not feeling sorry for himself. He has a great job, keeps up with his grades in school and he said he wants to help educate athletes who could learn a few lessons from his story.

“Athletes need to know that you never know when your last play will be. My last at-bat [before the injury] was a weak, check-swing groundout to first base. I’ll never get that back. I haven’t been handed anything, and even though this happened to me, the world isn’t going to stop just because I can’t play baseball.”

STEVE GAMEL can be reached at 940-566-6869 and via Twitter at @NewspaperSteve.



AP file photos

Kim Jong Nam, left, was the exiled half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, right. Kim Jong Nam’s apparent assassination is strengthening calls for the U.S. to relist Pyongyang as a state sponsor of terrorism.

Lawmakers want N. Korea back on terrorism blacklist

By Matthew Pennington
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The apparent assassination of the North Korean leader’s estranged half-brother is strengthening bipartisan calls for the U.S. to relist North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism, a designation lifted nine years ago. Doing so would increase the country’s isolation, while potentially complicating any future diplomacy to halt its nuclear and missile programs.

The U.S. kept North Korea on its terrorism blacklist for two decades after the 1987 bombing of a South Korean airliner killed 115 people. But President George W. Bush lifted the designation in 2008 to smooth the way for aid-for-disarmament negotiations. The concession proved of little value as the talks collapsed soon after and have yet to resume.

Currently, the U.S. considers only Iran, Sudan and Syria as terrorism sponsors. To re-impose the designation on North Korea, the secretary of state would have to determine that it has “re-

peatedly” provided support for acts of international terrorism. Last June, the department said North Korea “is not known to have sponsored any terrorist acts” since the plane attack 30 years ago.

House lawmakers are pushing for a fresh review of the evidence. The death of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s exiled elder brother could make the case more persuasive. A pair of female assailants reportedly accosted Kim Jong Nam at an international airport in Malaysia on Monday, and he told medical workers he had been sprayed with a chemical.

“We should never have taken North Korea off the state sponsor of terrorism list,” Democratic Rep. Brad Sherman of California told a congressional hearing Thursday.

Trump has vowed to “deal with” North Korea but hasn’t said how. And it’s unclear if his administration would contemplate negotiations with the North, which wants to be treated as a nuclear power.

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