

# Get In The Game

## Drills For Disciples: Part 8

### Bench Busters

Written By  
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Even though you played on the team in the prior year, our baseball coach had everyone try out the next season. The competition couldn't have been stiffer and fiercer. I played left field my junior year; however, for my senior year something like eleven people came out for that position. Talk about stress. Talk about needing to be on your game.

When try outs ended, the coach placed a new team roster on the glass of his office door in the team locker room. Your adrenaline rushed as you walked to that room, turned the corner, and then looked for your name. Some guys walked away sad, disappointed, and dejected, while others basically high-fived each other. And all of us who made the team had one thing in mind: PLAYING BALL. No one ever said anything, "Man (a 60s and 70s term), I'm so glad I made the team. I can't wait to ride the bench and watch you guys play. That is going to be awesome. How cool." No, every man on that coveted roster competitively desired one thing: To play first string *every* game.

Fast forward this baseball motif to our present spiritual team. As your coach, let me pose some simple questions to you: As you sit on the bench, how are you sitting? What's our attitude?

- Are you lazily kicking back will other players actually play?
- Are you so overcome with a personal loss, you are sad and in shock to the point you just can't play at this point?

- Are you so caught up with the soon appearance of the Lord Jesus, the Team Owner, you spend a lot of quality time looking up while you are quite stationary?
- Are you content with talking about other players, or just visiting with other players while the game is on?
- Are you an older player who doesn't play hard anymore but just reminisces on old photos of your glory days of service to the team?
- Are you suited up and ready to go at game time but wind up being distracted by all the toys in your life?
- Have you not been in the game for so long there could easily be a sign hanging over you stating how many innings you've been benched?
- Or, are you suited up and ready to go when a position opens up and your skills are desperately needed?

Paul, a player of players, reminds us, in the playbook called Ephesians, we are not called to ride the bench and get bench blisters, but to use our God-given spiritual abilities to enhance the team and position it for victory against the opposing team of the Devil.

<sup>7</sup> But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN" (Ephesians 4).

In verses 1 through 6, Paul teaches us about the oneness we have as a team, and in the verses before us he moves to underscore our responsibility to that oneness/unity is intrinsically tied to our use of the gifts of grace. What are these? Grace, or *charis* (χάρις), reminds us we didn't earn these but received them by means of our faith in the Christ's redemptive work. Grace, or *charis*, also reminds us of the spiritual gifts, or *charismata*, Paul details in Romans 12:6 and 1 Corinthians 12:4, gifts all players possess, not some special facet or movement of the Church.

Do we all have the same spiritual gifts? No. They are lovingly measured to each of us by the Team Owner, Jesus, the Christ. Some have more than others, some have less, but we all have exactly the gift or gifts God desires for us to use for the benefit the body locally and universally. And, as Paul shows from his quote of Psalm 68, which is a call for God to come and rescue his people and vindicate them, after Jesus' death and ascension, He summarily defeated the opposing team, and, in turn, freely started giving spiritual gifts to His new team, the Church.

Paul's statement to the team in Ephesus in verses 11 through 12 leaves no doubt God's desire is for these unique gifts to be used by players who get in the game:

<sup>11</sup>And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4).

Players shouldn't miss the import of the use of our God-given gifts: the team is build up, not torn down (if the use of gifts tear down the Church, then something is definitely awry and

dysfunctional), and spiritual maturity is realized. Be honest as a player on God's team. You can't read those words and justify riding the bench. On the contrary, these words from the Sultan of Spiritual Swat, Paul, challenge each of us to get off the bench and into the thick of the game. That's what maturing players do and that's what we need to talk about in this study:

## Maturing Players Play

I know that sounds like a simple, no-brainer statement, but it has to be stated because it is one thing to know it and quite another to do it. Some players love to hang around the clubhouse, to study the playbook (that's the Bible), to get suited up on Sundays, to attend team food fests, and to evaluate team members who are actively and arduously playing on the field. Knowing this is the case, from a twenty-nine year career of coaching teams, I don't blush by stating the obvious. The Team Owner wants all of us to be running onto the field not to be riding on the bench.

To help each of you to get in the spiritual game so we can be an even more successful local team, I'd like to zero in on two pivotal concepts true about bench busters:

### They Play Because Of Sound Reasons

Paul already gave us a sound reason to move us from the bench to the field in Ephesians four: Jesus has gifted us to play hard for the team. Anything less, of course, is sin. To this we can't overlook or forget the words of the Team Owner, Jesus. Speaking to His original team of twelve players, He stated the obvious:

<sup>24</sup>And there arose also a dispute among them *as to* which one of them was regarded to be greatest. <sup>25</sup>And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' <sup>26</sup>But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. <sup>27</sup>For who is greater, the one who reclines *at the table* or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table*? But I am among you as the one who serves (Luke 22).

As we encountered in our detailed study of Matthew, the original Twelve struggled with playing from a carnal perspective. They thought playing was all about who was the best player, who was the most important, who had the beefiest stats, and who looked up to who ... just like you find in the wicked, selfish, self-consumed world. Verse 26 grammatically, which starts with second person personal pronoun at the head of the sentence (ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως ἀλλ' ὁ μείζων ἐν ὑμῖν γενέσθω ὡς ὁ νεώτερος καὶ ὁ ἡγούμενος ὡς ὁ διακονῶν), makes Christ's statement highly emphatic. His players aren't to be consumed with the stature, or with sitting around and thinking they're big shots, but they are to be focused intently on serving ... on playing. Did you get that?

Let's expand on this.

Jesus used His spiritual gifts in a servant fashion, so how can we do anything less. He is our ultimate model of how to play for the team.

- He didn't live for stardom but for anonymity and obscurity as He played.

- He wasn't afraid to do things other team players thought was beneath them (like washing the feet of the team prior to His crucifixion, John 13).
- He was sensitive to the lowliest member on the team, and even to members of the opponent's team.
- He wasn't afraid to sacrifice for the team.
- He wasn't put-out by team members who came to Him after a hard game and needed help.
- He wasn't afraid to care for team members of a different race or social class (or no class).
- He wasn't afraid to play hard against the dirtiest players the opponent's team could field (like the Pharisees and Sadducees).
- He set the example for all players on His team and His example drips with selfless, active service.

Jesus is the quintessential player of all players, isn't He? He never sat willingly on the bench, but willingly jumped into the thick of the game and did it with selfless abandon. He now challenges each of us to do the same, to follow His model. Do you? If so, then, that's great. Go get 'em. If not, it's time to get out on that field and play hard. *The Team Owner didn't save you to sit. He saved you to serve.* We might need to repeat this timely truth one more time for the team.

A second concept true of great and maturing players is this:

## They Play Because Of Sound Reflections

Any player who has spent any time studying the playbook knows the first part of it (the Old Testament) and the second part of it (the New Testament) develops the concept that God has every intention for His players to play. Being bench buddies who sit and talk while other players are actively in the game has never been God's model for His team, whether that team was Israel in the period of the Law or the Church in the period of Grace. How do I know this? Because I've read the playbook and reflected on what it teaches about God's people serving.

Numbers 4 contains the details of the Levites in relation to the tearing down, moving, and setting up of the tabernacle, Israel's first ... and portable ... worship center as designed by God. Levi, one of the sons of Jacob who formed the twelve tribes of Israel, had three sons: Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. These men and their descendants were directly responsible for everything related to the tabernacle proper, from the bronze altar to the multiple wooden perimeter pillars. In chapter four we come face to face with their respective responsibilities, which are introduced first with this interesting statement for Moses:

<sup>1</sup>Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Take a census of the descendants of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, by their families, by their fathers' households <sup>3</sup> from thirty years and upward, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tent of meeting (Numbers 4).

Underscore that word “work.” God expected these ancient team members to play hard and to accomplish what He specifically called them to do. Since our time is limited, permit me to summarize what their play positions called them to do.

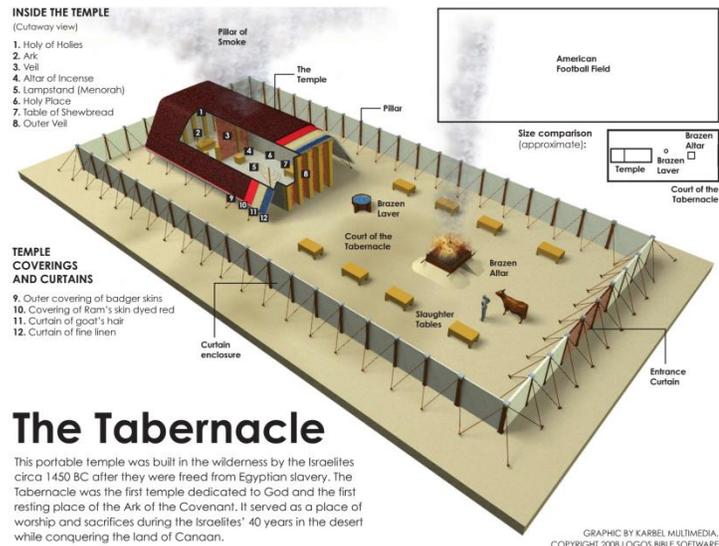
The Kohathites had to take care of all the most holy furnishings when it came time to move. Aaron and his sons, the priests, were responsible for covering all the holy furnishings lest they be seen and/or touched (vv. 4-15). When they were finished is when the Kohathites came onto the field and started playing:

<sup>15</sup>“When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy *objects* and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is to set out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry *them*, so that they will not touch the holy *objects* and die. These are the things in the tent of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry (Numbers 4).

According to verse 36, 2,750 men composed this team. Their job was risky insofar as they couldn't touch the holy items like the Ark of the Covenant under the penalty of death. Their job was super important, too, because of what they were allowed to move for God. Their job was heavy and hard, too, for they had to pick up wooden items covered in gold. The Ark was 3' 9" long, 2' 3" wide, and 2' 3" high, making it a heavy piece of furniture. The menorah, or golden lampstand, was pure gold. No telling what it weighed. They had to pick up these items along with the table of showbread, the various altars (the bronze altar for sacrifice, according to Exodus 27:1-8, 7 ½ feet square by 4 ½ feet high and was covered with bronze ... an alloy of copper and tin. Bet that was heavy too), utensils, screen and so forth and transport them across shifting desert sands for God and then set them up again.

The Gershonites took care of all the curtains of the tabernacle, which measured 45' by 15' (or 675 square feet). And don't think for a moment these were light and easy to move either. Think large and massive. Four huge curtains covered the tabernacle like a roof. Exodus 26 gives us the rough dimensions of the curtain coverings. The first, a linen curtain, was 60' by 42.' The second, a goat's hair curtain, was 66' in length and probably as wide as the linen curtain. The third, a ram's skin curtain, was equally massive, and a fourth composed of some 1,000 to 1,500 badger skins covering some 6,000 square feet rested atop everything. Imagine the collective weight of all of these skins, and the difficulty of folding and moving them.

The Merarites pulled up the rear by doing the heavy lifting. They hauled all of the 48 wooden frames of the tabernacle, which consisted close to 100 socket bases of silver. Each board was 15' high, 27" wide, and 18" thick (Exodus 26:15-25). They rested on silver sockets. We know from the census of Numbers 1 that Israel's men gave a total of 301,775 shekels of silver as a contribution. Since one talent of silver consisted of 3,000 shekels at least 100 talents of silver, totaling some 6,600 pounds made up the various sockets. Talk about weight. Talk about a tough job. They also had to move the pillars of the outer court, too. This linen lined court, which



measured 75' by 150' (Exodus 27:9ff), giving Israel some 11,250 square feet for worship of God (about the size of four tennis courts), contained close to sixty massive wooden pillars. These, in turn, rested on bronze sockets with silver hooks for standing all the collective eight foot panel vertical. Again, imagine the weight involved. Staggering.

What do we learn from this brief snapshot about how the team functioned in the Old Testament ?

- Everyone had a job to do on the team.
- Some jobs were more prestigious than others, but they were all important.
- If anyone dropped the ball on regarding their duties, then the team couldn't play effectively ... nor could God be worshipped.
- Some jobs were tougher and more physically demanding than others.
- What God called some to do was more difficult and demanding than what He called others to do ... but everyone was key to the team.
- Everyone had to take great care in how they played in their position.
- It took more players to do the heavy lifting than it did in the other areas. There were 2,750 Kohathites, 2,630 Gershonites, and 3,200 Merarites (Numbers 4:34-49).

Nobody was left on the bench. Everyone was in the game. Talk about a winning team, and this was, and is, God's design even today.

Paul articulates this in his first letter to the Corinthians; namely, chapter 12. To listen to him speak to New Testament saints, who are priests of God (*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises" of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."* 1 Peter 2:9), is to see him touching upon some of the same concepts from God's words to Moses in Exodus and Numbers. Here the wise coach likens his team members to a body.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>12</sup>For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

<sup>13</sup>For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Exciting words from the playbook, wouldn't you agree?

Why does Paul liken the team to a body? Simple. A body is unified, yet diverse. A body has various body parts, serving different functions, no matter how insignificant they may appear, yet in the final analysis the body is one self-contained organism designed to work with not against itself. All gifted parts are supposed to, by nature, work in constant unison to accomplish the desire and direction of the head.

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<sup>1</sup> Different metaphors are used in the New Testament to describe the universal Church of Jesus Christ. In Revelation, John calls it the *Bride* (Rev. 19:7-8; 21:2, 9; 22:17). In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul calls it the *Building of God* (1 Cor. 3:9), and the *Temple of God* (1 Cor. 3:16-17). . In Galatians 6:10, Paul calls it the *Family of Believers*. Of these snapshots, one of the most helpful is the one found here before us: The Church is a *Body*, or more precisely, the *Body of Christ*. Read through the Apostle's other writings, and you'll readily discover he enjoyed and favored this description (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 10:17; Ephesians 1:23; 2:16; 4:4; Colossians 1:18, 22).



Think of Justin Turner of the 2015 L.A. Dodgers who had a post-seasons batting average of .526. Yes, you read that right. For his bat to be this red hot, his entire body had to work with, not against, itself. So it is to be with the body of Christ, the Church, and its local expression in a church like BCC.

How does one become a member of this team? Simple. You join this team by trading teams. That amazing, life-changing moment occurs when you, the sinner, see, by faith, that Christ died and rose from the grave to defeat sin and death for you (John 3:16; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 10:9; Galatians 3:27). The precise moment you place your faith in His redemptive work you are mystically baptized by the Holy Spirit into His body, which means you are placed, for all eternity, on His magnificent team. Have you traded teams yet? You'll never regret it.

What is this heavenly team, which is likened unto a human body, like? Read on in the playbook and you'll see. As we read will draw practical conclusions as we should to help form us into better players:

<sup>14</sup>For the body is not one member, but many. <sup>15</sup>If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. <sup>16</sup>And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body.

By using conditional statements, and arguing from the lesser (the foot, the ear), to the greater (the hand, the eye), the Coach emphatically underscored the vital importance of all body parts. A foot may not be as useful as a hand, after all, look at all the things a hand can do as opposed to a dirty, ol' foot. A hand does ten times as much as a foot in a given day, and its fine motor movements are most impressive. Yet, who would ever say, "Ah, I don't really need my feet 'cause my hands are so gifted"? Point is, nobody with a half a brain would say that. Therefore, if the Body of Christ were just one big foot, then the Body wouldn't be able to do very much would it? All parts are important. All parts serve great and necessary purposes.

There's more:

<sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup>But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. <sup>19</sup>If they were all one member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>But now there are many members, but one body. <sup>21</sup>And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; <sup>23</sup>and those *members* of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, <sup>24</sup>whereas our more presentable members have no need *of it*. But God has *so* composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked, <sup>25</sup>so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same

care for one another. <sup>26</sup>And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

From these powerful verses from the playbook we learn a few more important game-changing truths.

- Not everyone can, and will, have a seemingly important job like a complex eye; however, who can say that hearing isn't important. Translated, not everyone can be the pitcher or designated hitter. Someone has to play right field. Someone has to be the all-important water boy.
- Body or team members with greater gifting cannot and should not look down at those with lesser gifts. Everyone is important to the success of the team and the body.
- Those with lesser gifts shouldn't be jealous of the more gifted because their gifting is of real importance to the body/team. Consider your gifting is tantamount to eyebrows. What is their purpose? They are a big deal as we learn from the website: [howstuffworks.com](http://howstuffworks.com):

Scientists aren't entirely sure why we kept this hair, but they have a pretty good guess. We know that eyebrows help keep moisture out of our eyes when we [sweat](#) or walk around in the rain. The arch shape diverts the rain or sweat around to the sides of our face, keeping our eyes relatively dry. The most obvious advantage of this is that it lets us see clearly when we're sweating a lot or out in the [rain](#). Without eyebrows, getting around in these conditions is a little more difficult. The shape of your brow itself diverts a certain amount of moisture, but eyebrows make a significant difference in your ability to see. Diverting the sweat away is also good because the salt in sweat irritates the eyes, making them sting a little.<sup>2</sup>

What's the purpose of the earlobe? I know what my wife will say, but what is the scientific purpose?

The earlobe, also called the lobule, is the fleshy lower part of the outer ear that hangs down and is designed to collect sound waves from the air and guide them to the tympanic membrane, more commonly called the eardrum. The vibration of the eardrum sends sound waves down into the inner ear, where these sounds are processed by delicate sensory organs and then processed by the brain.<sup>3</sup>

And you thought they were no big deal. Oh, no, you need them to hear well.

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<sup>2</sup> "Why Do We Have Eyebrows?" How Stuff Works, accessed October 29, 2015, <http://health.howstuffworks.com/human-body/systems/eye/question520.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> "What Is The Purpose Of The Earlobes?" Ask.com, accessed October 29, 2015, <http://www.ask.com/science/purpose-earlobes-20008aadfd9e42e>.

- Laced through this Pauline paragraph like a piece of leather holding the webbing of a outfielders glove together is the fact that Jesus, the Team Owner, places us where He wants us on the team and gifts us accordingly. Cool. This is what Paul states clearly in verse 24:

“But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked ...

The Greek word here for “composed” is most descriptive. According to *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature* by Walter Bauer, *sugkerannumi* (συγκεράννυμι) refers to literally mixing various colors together.<sup>4</sup> God, like a master painter, mixes His paints (you and I) carefully, and then paints how He best sees fit to create a masterpiece. Simply amazing.

- Finally, we are so intricately connected what happens to one of us happens to all. Putting all this in a team format can go like this: If part of the team is riding the bench, while the rest of the team is playing their hearts out, it pulls the whole team down. On the contrary, if everyone is out on the field playing their divinely ordained positions, then we all benefit.

See what I mean? As I stated when we headed into the playbook, God is deeply and intimately interested in all of His players getting in the game for the good of the heavenly team. Sure, we are all gifted differently, but we all are called to play, to get plugged in.

All of this naturally segues into a very practical team question. While you are praying about how you should be giving God of your treasures, you need to ask: *Where am I giving God my time and spiritual talents to the advancement of this exciting and winning local team?* I think I need to repeat that statement because it’s so important. *Where am I giving God my time and my time and spiritual talents to the advancement of this exciting and winning local team?*

Let’s pretend for a moment that our sanctuary is our dugout and you’re presently sitting on the bench. As you can see, we have a very large team, especially considering we have four services per Sunday. On a team this size, there are, as you might surmise, ample opportunities for you to be in the game with your God-given gifts. Before we look at them, allow me to submit a few Bench Busting Myths:

- Because we have a lot of players they are all playing. The truth? It takes a lot of players to effectively staff our field for any given game, be it a Harvest Festival or a Men’s Breakfast.
- Players who are playing have a lot of free time to give to the team, which is not my life as a player currently. The truth? Most of our stellar players are as busy or busier than you. Playing to win involves teammates willing to sacrifice.

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<sup>4</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 773.

- When there is a call from the coach (me, Marty), to come out and fill in a given team position, we always receive all the players we need. The truth? That happens sometimes, but not always.
- I'm an introvert and just don't know where I'd plug-in. The truth? That's no excuse, really. I'm an introvert and look what the Team Owner has got me doing. Talk about moving someone out of their comfort zone.
- I had a difficult time on my last team so I'm just going to lay low and recuperate. The truth? That might work (and he quite necessary) for a short period; however, imagine if a Merarite ever followed through on that thinking.
- I don't know what my spiritual gift is so I don't know where to serve. The truth? Many players say this literally FOR YEARS. Don't you think it's time you ardently searched and asked the Team Owner to help you ascertain how He has sovereignly gifted you? You bet.

I'll stop there because I think the bench mindset has been busted by blasting some of the myths players hold onto.

Now, let's get to business.

Where can you get in the game around here?

Our Quest program to fifth and sixth graders is looking for 1 male and 1 female group leaders at both the 9:30 and 11:00 a.m. game times.

Here are needs in our all-important and growing children's area:

- 8:15 Preschool Lead
- 11:00 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher & Small Group Leaders
- 11:00 toddler lead
- 11:00 Preschool Assistant
- 6:00 Preschool Lead
- 6:00 Toddler Assistant
- 6:00 Substitutes (Without the sacrificial team members playing here currently we wouldn't be able to offer anything to the children who come for the evening service with their parents. What a key position this is.)
- We always have need for substitutes at all services

With all these children's needs, I need to blast one more bench myth:

- I don't have any experience working in the children's area. The truth? We have numerous players who used to say the same thing and they've turned out to be some of our most stellar players.
- I used to work with children and/or teens when I was younger, but I'm leaving that now to the younger folks. The truth? Nowhere in Old or New Testaments do you find the Team Owner saying your age excludes you from the possibility of playing at these levels. Some of the greatest players to impact my young life were senior citizens. So, let's get after it.

And these are not, by any means, all the needs our team has. There is plenty of room for you to step into a position on the field. What are you waiting for? The game is red hot.

