



GOIN' BEYOND SECOND WITH

NEIL WALKER

IN BLAZING 90-DEGREE WEATHER, PIRATES FANS EXPECT A SCORCHING GAME; HOWEVER, THIS SEASON, IT'S NOT JUST THE HUMIDITY HEATING UP PNC PARK – IT IS THE NEW SECOND BASEMAN, NEIL WALKER. IF YOU'VE GROWN UP IN A SUBURB OF THE CITY, IT IS PLAUSIBLE TO DREAM ABOUT MAKING IT BIG WITH THE HOMETOWN TEAM, BUT HERE'S THE KICKER – WALKER ACTUALLY DID IT. AFTER YEARS OF PRACTICE, PATIENCE AND DEDICATION, THE BUCCOS CHOSE WALKER AS THEIR 2004 FIRST-ROUND DRAFT PICK. AFTER BEING CALLED UP FROM THE MINOR LEAGUE LAST SEPTEMBER, WALKER'S DREAM OF BEING ON THE PIRATES EVOLVED TO REALITY.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY *april hubal*
BY *jennifer shore*

WALKER OPENED UP TO MANIAC IN A Q&A SESSION TO SHARE HIS EXPERIENCES, ASPIRATIONS AND INTERESTS. (UNFORTUNATELY, AT THE TIME, HE WAS NOT WEARING HIS TIGHT BASEBALL PANTS.)

MM: Can you talk about your experience of going directly from a Pine Richland High School senior to a Pittsburgh Pirate?

NW: I don't think I knew what to really expect when I was drafted in high school. It was just a new experience for me overall, but I enjoyed every second of it. I had a lot of new experiences and met a lot of great people along the way in getting to Pittsburgh.

MM: Did you ever imagine you would be playing for the team you grew up watching?

NW: I kind of dreamt and always envisioned myself as playing at Three Rivers Stadium when I was a kid. I always told myself that I drove past the ballpark with my mom and dad... I've always seen myself as a Pittsburgh Pirate. It's funny how that worked out.

MM: Do you think the tight baseball pants are a fashion statement?

NW: [Laughs.] I don't think so. You see the guys wearing their pants different ways – wearing them with their socks showing, draped over their shoes, wearing them somewhere in between. I guess it can be. We certainly don't see it that way. We certainly see it as comfort. We have to wear them on a daily basis for about five hours during the day. We're more worried about comfort rather than style, but at the same time, everybody wants to look good.

MM: What's your non-uniform look? What do you wear casually?

NW: I'm usually wearing jeans quite a bit. When we're on the road we have to wear slacks and sport coats and things like that... Casually, I like to wear real nice jeans and sneakers or dress shoes. I can normally be caught with a polo shirt and some nice jeans on.

MM: What's the perfect ballgame attire for fans?

NW: I'd say a nice pair of jeans and some sneakers and a nice t-shirt. For you to come to a Pirates game, obviously, you have to be sporting your Pirates "P" hat, maybe a vintage, old-school Pirates t-shirt and some jeans. I think that's the perfect way to watch a ballgame... I know if I were coming to watch a ballgame, that's what I would be wearing.

MM: If Primanti's wanted to name a sandwich after you, what would be on it?

NW: I guess you'd definitely have to start with the normal bread and the steak... I think I would throw some Italian type of flare to it like some ham and some turkey—even on top of the steak- along with the coleslaw and the French fries and the bread and the steak patty. With some vinegar and oil, I think you've got yourself a Walker Sandwich.

MM: What has been your most memorable experience with the Pirates?

NW: Hitting my first home-run. At this point, that's probably the most memorable moment of my Pirates career. To do it in Pittsburgh and do it in front of the fans and also have it help win the game was something really cool.

MM: What are you looking forward to in the future with the Pirates?

NW: I think the most important thing is winning games and winning a lot more games and working toward being a contender, a playoff team. I want to find a way to be able to stay here and give back to the city that I've grown up watching with a passion for, sports-wise and also living there and being my first home. I just feel like I want to do whatever I can to stay here for my entire career.

MM: Anything else you want to say to your fans?

NW: It's tough being a Pirates fan recently so tell the fans to hang with us and believe in us as we believe in each other as baseball players. It's a tough sport. It's a tough game to win. In a sport if you're successful getting hits 30 percent of the time, you're considered an All-Star. When you look at baseball like that, it's definitely a tough sport. We're all working hard, and we're all going out there and trying to win on a nightly basis, I think it's just a matter of time before things turn. I hope the fans will stick with us as they have with the Penguins and the Steelers and will continue to support us because we're definitely working hard to get more people in the stands and win more games.



I KIND OF DREAMT AND ALWAYS ENVISIONED MYSELF AS PLAYING AT THREE RIVERS STADIUM WHEN I WAS A KID.