

Larry Walker Media Availability 2021-09-02

Jon Shestakofsky

Well hello everyone and welcome to today's media availability with class of 2020 Hall of Fame Inductee, Larry Walker. My name is Jon Shestakofsky, Vice President of Communications and Education at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. As you know on this coming Wednesday, September 8th, Larry will be inducted into the Hall of Fame right here in Cooperstown. And the ceremony will be broadcast on MLB network and is free and open to the public. This is the last of our three class of 2020 inductee conference calls today. Please note that these media sessions are being recorded, and transcripts will become available to media within the next 48 hours at the Hall of Fame's website baseballhall.org. Larry, we thank you for joining us on this call. And we are now ready to take questions from the call participants. So if you'd like to ask a question of Larry Walker, please click reactions at the bottom of your screen and then click the raise hand button. Note we are not accepting questions over email. So we'll have to see your raised hand on the Zoom format. And the first question, when we do when we do identify you to speak please note you'll have to unmute yourself and you'll be prompted to do so. So the first question will come from Frederick Daigle. Frederick he can unmute yourself now.

Frederic Daigle

Yes, thank you. Thanks, Larry, for doing this. Obviously, you had many stops in your career and what did you take from your Expos years that served you throughout your illustrious career?

Larry Walker

Well, the Expo years is where I basically learned everything, you know, I came into baseball as very raw and a little behind everybody. So they gave me the opportunity to learn the game, to move up in my career and that I did it to every level one one year at every level until I made it to the major leagues. And you know, without the Montreal Expos, we might not be having this conversation right now, because baseball might not have been something I did.

Frederic Daigle

Did you talk with Felipe Alou at all since you've been elected? I know it's been a long time with with the pandemics and all you have time to talk with him? And if so what? What was, what did you talk about?

Larry Walker

I actually have not. Felipe, I believe there was a text message from him once, like you say, it's been a while. There's so many so many messages, but I, I believe I had one from him. And then I, I don't know how accurate it was. I thought maybe he was not health wise, was not doing good. So he wasn't communicating with a lot of people. So I haven't been up to date on where he is right now. In that sense.

Frederic Daigle

How's that speech coming along? I know you were, you thought it would be a heck of a word for the workload for you. So how is it coming along?

Larry Walker

I believe it's final. I keep practicing it. You know what I'm trying to just keep it short, simple. Not going over the top, on any one subject or any one person or any one team. Just trying to, you know, show how gracious I am for this opportunity without having everybody fall asleep during the middle of the speech.

Frederic Daigle

Congratulations again and thank you.

Larry Walker

Thank you, Frederick.

Jon Shestakofsky

Thanks, Frederick. Next up, Patrick Saunders. Go ahead and unmute yourself, Patrick.

Patrick Saunders

Hi Larry. Congratulations again.

Larry Walker

Thanks, Patrick.

Patrick Saunders

I wanted to ask you, did you do this speech all by yourself? Or did you get a little help? I know sometimes people reach out to friends writers whatever to help them craft their speech, or did you do it all by yourself?

Larry Walker

The speech was done all by myself. It was it was aided as far as punctuation and maybe making it sound like a human being is actually saying it but it was all done by me and everything that I'm saying in it came from many sleepless nights when I'd wake up in the middle of night and jot on my phone at three in the morning. What was going through my head.

Patrick Saunders

When you get up there next Wednesday, and Cooperstown? What are the butterflies gonna be like, then compared to maybe, I don't know, facing Randy Johnson in the All-Star Game, let's say.

Larry Walker

Well stepping in a batter's box for 50,000 people in the stands. There's really not many nerves, you know, and if they are they don't last very long. And as I've been telling with Shesta there for the past few weeks as we get closer and closer, and now we're within a week, there's nights where I don't go to

sleep. And when I do go to sleep, it's not for very long because I'm waking up and it's all going through my head. So believe me butterflies are here, right now. And they're there's a lot of them.

Patrick Saunders

And one more for me, Larry, because of the pandemic of course, your induction has been delayed. But has your life changed significantly since you got word that you were, indeed a member of the Hall of Fame?

Larry Walker

I don't believe it has. You know, I guess I've been caught on many occasions when somebody wants me to sign something, and I signed something and I give it back to them. And then they give it back to me because I forget to put HOF 2020 on there. So I guess that reality of it hasn't sunk in and I'm getting the feeling come Thursday or Wednesday evening, that will finally sink in and become more of a reality than it already is. Like I say, it's weird to, to hear people say something about me on TV. And now the word Hall of Famer comes before and as you'll hear in my speech, I don't necessarily consider myself a Hall of Famer at anything. So to be in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown is quite the honor and thrill.

Patrick Saunders

Thanks, Larry. Appreciate it.

Larry Walker

You got it, man.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next up is Shi Davidi. Shi, you can unmute yourself now.

Shi Davidi

Hey, Larry, thanks for doing this. Congrats again.

Larry Walker

Thanks, Shi.

Shi Davidi

I'm just wondering, I want to take you back to 1988. That season that you missed with the knee injury, I wonder if you can describe how that happened. And I'm just wondering, at that point in time, how severe of an injury did you think that was? And did you think that was something that could possibly derail your career?

Larry Walker

Well, surprisingly enough, at that stage of my career, that was after my season at double A, they asked everybody on the team who wanted to go to winter ball, I think I was the only one that said no. And I was the only one that went, so it was kind of ironic, but you know, I got down there, I knew I wasn't too adapt at hitting off speed pitches, and going down to Mexico and Hermosillo I got that opportunity to hit

off speed pitches. So that was very beneficial. The way that accident happened was I was just scoring a routine run from third base, there was really no play at the plate. I had on at the time, those plastic cleats I guess you want to call them but they were plastic. And somehow or way my foot hit the plate and it slid a little bit my leg locked and the weight of my body kept going over my leg and my knee bent backwards in the other direction and completely tore my medial collateral, lateral collateral, and my ACL in half so like I said, I didn't consider myself good enough to be a big league ballplayer wasn't going through my head at that, at that stage of my career. I was just I was having fun playing baseball and you know doing fairly good at it and wasn't really expecting much so when that did happen, I was out of Mexico the next day and went up to Montreal and had the surgery and like I say if the thoughts of being a major leaguer weren't in my brain before the accident, they sure weren't in it after because I was laying on mom and dad's sofa for a few months.

Shi Davidi

A bit of a different note of I want to take you back to the point in time where you made the decision that you weren't going to play hockey anymore. And I you know, up to that point, you know, what was baseball to you? Was baseball just a thing you did in summer as a hobby was how serious of a pursuit was it parallel to hockey? And then how did maybe take us through those some of your thinking in terms of the shift there?

Larry Walker

Yeah, I didn't play a lot of baseball and this will be I'll touch on this a bit during my speech, as long as long as I don't choke and can't speak and but I will touch on it. But I you know, baseball wasn't a big thing. We didn't have high school baseball at the time. So I didn't I didn't play a lot. Games were very minimal and and they weren't too advanced, I guess. But, but that year that I didn't make the Regina Pats for the second year in a row. Then I got the opportunity to go to Swift Current and Rick Herbert I played with two really good players, Rick Herbert and Cam Neely. I think everybody knows what Cam did and went on in his career. Rick Herbert had that ability as many thought he was better than Cam but he made it the Regina Pats. And his dad drove me to Swift Current. And I drove into the town and I stopped at the rink and I looked around and I don't know why. But I just said, You know what, this isn't for me. And I decided that I wasn't going to pursue hockey after two failures at the Regina Pats. So we continued on driving back home to Maple Ridge, British Columbia and that's when it ended and then and then baseball kind of came knocking on my door. I didn't necessarily knock on it.

Shi Davidi

And how did you end up on the Canadian Junior National Team at the first time?

Larry Walker

Just tryouts the British Columbia said come try out. And they said, Okay, well you're, you're this select group that's going to go and represent Team Canada. I was like, okay, sweet.

Shi Davidi

Awesome. Thanks, Larry. Appreciate it.

Larry Walker

All right, Shi.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next up is Manny Randhawa. Manny, go right ahead.

Manny Randhawa

Hey, Larry.

Larry Walker

Hey Manny.

Manny Randhawa

First, I want to ask you, you said you didn't have you never consider yourself a Hall of Famer or anything. But was there ever a time in your career during your career that you cross your mind that it's a possibility?

Larry Walker

Well, this is weird, because I'm going to say what I just told you, in my speech in my speech, that I didn't consider myself a Hall of Famer. So I feel like I'm gonna repeat myself come Wednesday. But that's, you know, like I say, I, I take everything in my life as just an average guy. You know, I don't I don't put myself on a pedestal and never have in anything. And I don't recall any time in my career where I could actually look in the mirror or sit there and think of myself as a Hall of Famer that I, I don't recall one time, you know, like I say, you hear a lot of guys saying they played a game to win. And that's it. You know, when people ask me what your favorite, favorite year was, and I usually list the three years I made, I don't usually I always do I always list the three years we made it to the playoffs. And they know that that's the that's the best feeling. You know, because you're out there playing a team sport, and you celebrate with the, with the rest of the team. And like I say that champagne in the eye hurts, but it sure is fun, you know, because you know, you won something.

Manny Randhawa

You're the first position player from Canada, that will step to that stage and make that speech. You're also the first Rockie former Rockie that will ever step to that stage and make a speech. What does it mean to you to be the first in those categories?

Larry Walker

Well, the Canadian thing's, obviously a big thrill to be able to join Fergie and, and be one of two that have made it from North of the border. Obviously, there's more coming from North of the border, this. There's some really good talent. And I think obviously, the first one is Joey Votto with what he's doing. But yeah, it's it's beyond a big thrill to have the the Maple Leaf tattooed on my arm and going into to the Hall of Fame. To be the first Rockie, yeah, that that's, I mean, I guess that's, that is awesome. And I hope it opens the door for other other ones. I know, that's been a big talk. And with the inflated stats, that Coors Field presented and, and brought everybody's way and still does that it creates a little bit of a black eye and people kind of see it as you know, not rewarding enough for or not deserving enough. So. But like I say, I as a as my only time being a free agent, I chose Colorado and now I get to, you

know, put that CR on my cap on a plaque on the wall to represent that organization. So it's, it's a proud moment for me and the fans and management of the Rockies.

Manny Randhawa

And the last one for me. How important are first of all, will you be involved with the club going forward? Do you think? And also, how important is it for a club like the Rockies to embrace their past and embrace their former stars, especially now with you going into the Hall of Fame and kind of have a role for them going forward?

Larry Walker

Well, I think they've done that in a way, you know Walt Weiss came back and managed. You know, Dante came back and coached, Vinnie's still they're doing it. So it's not just them, I think it's the player as well that could say, and I'm quite content, being out of the spotlight. That's where I'm comfortable. I don't think I'm very good at coaching. It's hard for me to express. But it is why I wouldn't say enough, I don't think to satisfy management to talk to a hitter on how to hit I think it's, I think there's too much talk sometimes and the art of hitting is very difficult as it is. And if you can, if you can do it three times out of 10 you're in an elite class, so I just feel that you know, the hitting is so much more mental than it is physical and some hitting coaches spend way too much time in the cage trying to change swings and everything when swinging at a strike would be the easiest solution, you know, so it's a tough one for me, and I don't think I excel very well as a coach. So I'm kind of staying away from that.

Manny Randhawa

That one I relayed from Thomas Harding who really wanted to be on this and he says congrats and hello and thanks but I appreciate it.

Larry Walker

Yeah, that Thomas is probably on the golf course. I'm guessing, right?

Manny Randhawa

Probably.

Larry Walker

All right Manny, take care.

Manny Randhawa

Take it easy.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next up Romi Bean. Romi, go right ahead.

Romi Bean

Hi, Larry, congratulations on this credible achievement.

Larry Walker

Thanks, Romi.

Romi Bean

You mentioned there with the one time we were free agent, you chose the Rockies. Why were the Rockies a fit for you? Why did you want to come to Colorado?

Larry Walker

Well, this was another. I feel like I'm divulging my entire speech right now. But you know, the big thing for me, with the Rockies? Well, there's two big things. The first being the first games were played at Mile High Stadium. And you know, when you're I guess performer and entertainer or baseball player, whatever we want to call us, it is it's a blast when every seats full, and the places rockin and, and that's what that place was obviously with 85,000 people. So that was very exciting to see how hungry the Colorado fan base was for baseball. And, and really where Denver is situated, it reminded me of where I grew up. You know, I grew up in the mountains in British Columbia. And, you know, there was snow capped mountains all the time. And that fresh mountain air and just, those were two pretty attractive big attractions for me.

Romi Bean

I don't know if I was gonna say what is your fondest your best memory of your time as a Rockie?

Larry Walker

Well, they know 95 was the first year of the wildcard and we managed to win that. So there's that champagne in the eye thing again, that was my first experience at that. So that, you know, it started off with a bang. And unfortunately, that we didn't in my time there, make it to the playoffs again. But that was that was the best time.

Romi Bean

Thank you so much. Congratulations.

Larry Walker

Thank you.

Jon Shestakofsky

Mark, are you there?

Mark

Yep. Hello, can you hear me?

Larry Walker

Yep.

Mark

Great. Hi, Larry. Congratulations. Thank you. Our company that the organization that I work for, is very into defensive performance. So I have a couple of defense questions for you. Can you reflect on the

value of your defense in making you the complete player that you were? I guess that would be my first one.

Larry Walker

Well, it's, you know, like, when I touched on earlier, I was when I was a little behind everybody else, because I didn't have high school baseball, or college baseball. So there was a lot of learning for me to do along the way. And, and defense was no different than for me hitting or base running, or just everyday rules of the game, I had to learn it all. So I took my defense as serious as anybody else. And, and like I say, by watching others and learning from others and all the coaching and winter ball and instructional leagues that I did after seasons. It was a pride thing I you know, there's it's a good feeling when you throw somebody out at home to save your pitcher a run and then you're running in and the pitcher is there ready to high five you. So it's a great feeling of accomplishment.

Mark

Is there a defensive play that you want people to think of as the Larry Walker play when they watch say, a Larry Walker highlight tape?

Larry Walker

Well, I think my defensive play that everybody talks about the most was when I caught the second out at Dodger Stadium, and I handed the ball with a kid with two outs. That was a defensive play, right?

Mark

That wasn't of your better ones, though.

Larry Walker

Yeah, but one I remembered.

Mark

Do you have one of a more positive nature?

Larry Walker

Well, you know, the one that the ones because I worked on a little different everybody else was the ones of dekeing the base runners on catching a ball when I really had no chance of catching it, and playing playing it off the wall. You see that so many times, and it's usually just a guy throwing his glove up. And there's really nothing else involved with the the eyes or the body or the positioning. So I really took an art into trying to position and make it look like I was actually catching the ball. I was looking up in the sky at a place where the ball wasn't where a lot of guys look where the ball is. So I gave that effect of it. And I know there's there's one game, it was actually that 22 inning game in Montreal, where I deked Eddie Murray and to not scoring on a, I think he was on second, on a double hit to right field and I had no chance of catching the ball off the wall played it and got it in and nobody ended up scoring. And I guess people probably liked that or they didn't because the game continued on for 22 innings.

Mark

So that's cool. That doesn't usually show up in the box score. That's good stuff. Thank you, Larry.

Larry Walker

You got it. You're welcome.

Jon Shestakofsky

And we have time for just a few more. Next up Anna Laible. Anna go right ahead.

Anna Laible

Hi, I'm a kid writer, reporter and podcaster. I first wanted to say congratulations on being inducted.

Larry Walker

Thank you.

Anna Laible

I just had two questions. What was it like for you making your first All Star Game and also winning your first Gold Glove in same season in 1992. And how do you think that helped catapult your career?

Larry Walker

Well, as soon as you said the 92 All Star Game, it obviously was a big thrill to be able to be in that clubhouse with all the great stuff that first half of the season and just a very nervous time, because it's your first time. So you try to not say too much and, and kind of just take all in and watch. Then I'll share one weird story with that 92 All Star game. And it happened shortly before the game. We were in San Diego playing. And that was the one game when Tony Fernandez got a base hit to right field. And I threw him out at first base. And he was none too happy. And, and he was at the All-Star Game too. And we didn't really say too much or look at each other very much. Because I think he was I don't know, maybe both mad and embarrassed about it all. But it was a little nerve wracking being around him in the clubhouse that day. I don't know if that answered both questions.

Anna Laible

Thank you. And my other question was, can you describe what it was like for you, when you found out that you had been inducted into the Hall of Fame and what sort of celebration you did?

Larry Walker

Well, the celebration, you know, not knowing what was gonna happen. I did have my brother in town and my best friend was in town. And they were here because it was the it was the final time there was no more voting after that 10th year, so they came into town for that just in case and, and we all hung out cooked dinner and just mingled around and did things all day and actually for a couple days, the night before we stayed up and listened to a bunch of music videos, mostly led by the band Rush. And, and then once that call came in, it was like I say, for me, it was interviews and phone calls. And for them it was you know, they were all so appreciative and, and celebrate and then just happy to be a part of it as I was happy to have them there.

Anna Laible

Great, thank you.

Larry Walker

You bet.

Jon Shestakofsky

Thanks, Anna. Next up is Ben Birnell. Ben, go right ahead.

Ben Birnell

Hey, Larry, congratulations. Thanks for taking the time. I know you mentioned. You know, you started a career with Montreal. And I know back in 1985. Your first pro season was in Utica. I work for the Observer Dispatch in Utica. So I guess my question is, what do you kind of remember about that first year and playing in Utica?

Larry Walker

Well, once again, there will be a little Utica talk in my speech. But I'll stay away from that. And I'll go to a different thing that I remember. I don't know if it's a good thing. But it's a funny thing, I guess. You know, as we all know, life in the minor leagues isn't. It's not too rewarding, you know, so you do your best to, to survive. And, and a lot of times, that means mac and cheese to eat and transportation's limited. So, and we I stayed in a house with I think five other guys. And I remember, I got stuck to the basement. And I remember there was a couple of nights when, when the rains fell too much that water leaked and would be dripping on my bed. You know, and just like, wow, this is this is my first year into professional baseball. I was like, wow, this is this is you know, I didn't mind it one bit. You know, like I say it's a it was I thought it was all great. And I got to meet a lot of nice people and the team was managed obviously by Ken Brent and famous man himself along with his brother in Gene Glenn was a coach there who Gene and I spent many years together through our career as he has had a major league career himself as a coach. So but yeah, you know what, I had nothing but good things there. But I wish I could have played a little better, but it was a good. A good start for me into my career with Utica.

Ben Birnell

I know you were back in Cooperstown, you know, last year after you got the call and everything. Have you been back to Utica at all since then?

Larry Walker

I have not. I have not been back. Nope.

Ben Birnell

Okay, so 1985 was the last time that you were kind of in Utica.

Larry Walker

Yeah, that's it. This will be as close as I get.

Ben Birnell

Yeah. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Larry Walker

You got it.

Jon Shestakofsky

Just a couple left. I think Danny Gallagher's looking to ask a question. Danny you can unmute yourself. Danny we'll try and come back to you in a minute. Tom DeAngelo, go right ahead.

Tom D'Angelo

Hey, Larry. Congratulations.

Larry Walker

Hey Tom.

Tom D'Angelo

Larry, you talked about the waiting 10 years was it the angst kind of built as the years went along? Did you pay as much attention to everything voting, you know when everything would happen in the early years as you did the later years and then to what was that like as it would build to get to year 10?

Larry Walker

Yeah, I guess, you know, as I touched on earlier, I'd never really considered myself a Hall of Famer much. So there was, there was never any a thought in my head that yeah, this is going to happen. So, you know, to be completely honest, I didn't pay much attention. The first few years, I know, my percentages, were going to be between five and maybe 22 is where they topped up. But then the last few years, it grabbed my attention pretty good, you know, and it was, I actually had fun with it. I enjoyed going on. And I'm not a social media guy. I do have a Twitter account. And, and I go on there to look at a lot of things because there was tons of information there. And every now and then I would put some things in, more thank yous and anything else. But it was it was fun to follow around, follow along and see how the votes were going up. The last three years and, and I believe I set a record, I don't know, from being here, and then making it to the 75%. So it was it was, I guess, a little nerve wracking, but exciting to watch all at the same time.

Tom D'Angelo

So you waited 10 years, and then now you had a way to next year for the actual ceremony. Kind of appropriate, I guess. I mean, I guess that did that. You know, and that all came about? Did you think about this? You know, wait one more year?

Larry Walker

Yeah. No worries. Like I say again, you nailed it when you said I waited 10 years. What's one more this is a piece of cake right now. So yeah, well, good.

Tom D'Angelo

Well, one more quick one. And just just for me, personally, I work at the Palm Beach Post, you mentioned going to Colorado for the reason you went okay now you spend your post career in the exact opposite type of climates and exact opposite type of place. What was the reason behind settling in and Palm Beach?

Larry Walker

Well, we've got a couple little Rugrats here. So even though they're not little, no more than my two daughters are here. And like I say, this is the Montreal Expos were here when I when I started playing ball spring training was here, as you know, and that's that was the reason for settling and having a home here. So that keeps me keeps me coming back. But I do have a cabin up in the mountains of British Columbia. So and unfortunately, I haven't been back for two years because of the COVID. So it's looking forward to next year to getting back up in the mountains to that cabin. And that's that's my comfort place.

Tom D'Angelo

Thank you.

Larry Walker

You bet. Thanks, Tommy.

Jon Shestakofsky

And last question. We're going to try Danny Gallagher again. Danny.

Dan Gallagher

Danny, thanks very much. Yeah, Larry, we haven't talked for a while. When you were growing up in BC, play we changed for the Blue Jays and the Expos at the same time. And what was your reaction when the Blue Jays kind of passed on you as a free agent 84 before the Expos came along?

Larry Walker

Yeah, looking back to 84 when, when the Expos signed me, I know. Toronto was interested in I think the Cubs were as well. But there was minimal, minimal talk as far as I remember. So I don't I don't know if it was real talk or not. So it's tough. It's tough for me to comment as far as if it made me feel upset or anything but as a Canadian, though, I didn't really follow baseball growing up I think as you know, as many Canadians you grew up watching and playing hockey, so hockey was what I watched and paid most attention to and as far as a team, if I did watch a team, it was only because I went to their games because they're only a three hour drive away was the Seattle Mariners. So going to the Kingdome to watch them was the baseball team I if I follow the team at all, but I didn't really follow baseball that much.

Dan Gallagher

So what was your reaction with Bob Rogers showing so much interest in you as a scout? A scout from Portland, Oregon, from the other country below the border showing a lot of interest in a Canadian Larry Walker?

Larry Walker

Well, it's interesting you touch on that, Danny because I've, like I said, when I got scouted, I'm not sure I ever knew who scouted me. And I know Bob Rogers came to Montreal came to Vancouver and that's, that's he was in town when dad and I met with him to sign. I've always been told that Jim Fanning scouted me. And, and he referred to Bob Rogers to get up to Vancouver to sign me. So I don't know how accurate that is. But I've never been able to find out the truth and how or who was involved with my scouting?

Dan Gallagher

Yeah. Okay, good. Appreciate that. Very much. Larry.

Larry Walker

You got it Danny.

Jon Shestakofsky

And with that, I'll say a big thank you to Larry for spending some time with us this afternoon. And, Larry, we do look forward to celebrating your wonderful career here in Cooperstown next week. And thanks to all the members of the media, who were able to join us today. This does conclude our media availability schedule with class of 2020. inductees, and we look forward to seeing you all at the Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony, which takes place Wednesday, September 8th, after which Larry will be able to get a good night's sleep. Thanks, everyone.