

# Walter Bowser-Questions from the Community And Answers

## Early Childhood Years-Share with us what those years was like!

### Message to Youth

**QUESTION 1. What would you advise our youth about getting to next level of education after high school, college?**

**Walter:** Develop a game plan for what you really want to do and where (College) you want to go and finding out the requirements for getting there. Then, begin working on things (core subjects, standardize test preparation, etc.) to strengthen your qualifications or your background of those things necessary to get you there. Identify several people whom you can reach out to and serve as sources of references for needed applications.

**QUESTION 2. How do we reach the kids and teach them about being financially stable after their glory days are gone?**

**Walter:** People generally are not typically responsive to other people telling them how to live their lives, but they do respond to people with whom they trust. Find out the person/people that former student-athlete (now professional athlete or someone who is now working outside of athletics) respects the most whether it be a parent, aunt/uncle, coach, friend, etc. and try to convince them to impress upon the former student-athlete the importance of setting aside a certain percentage of weekly pay for investment through a certified financial advisor for current and future financial stability. Discourage "bling", "fancy purchasing", or "supposed can't-miss business opportunities".

### Huntington High School Years

**QUESTION 3. How competitive were the games between you and Leroy Keyes?**

**Walter:** They were always competitive, but in all of my direct competitions with Leroy, his team invariably came out ahead. I mean, the games were close, extremely competitive and my individual contest with him was in basketball, not football. In my individual match ups against him, I will say, I think the records show, that I did fairly well, and I most certainly stopped him from doing what he had been doing against everybody else. But it was difficult to contain him because he was a special athlete.

**QUESTION 4. What emotions did you feel as the first Black player in the state named to the sportswriters and sportscasters' all-state football and basketball teams?**

**Walter:** I was the first black high school football player voted by the sportswriters and sportscasters, not in basketball. And the first black player from a black school which was just as significant.

First, that's not something that we in the black community were aware that there was such an award. That never came up in discussions with the players and informal conversations. And most certainly that was not something that was discussed with the coaches. In fact, I cannot remember any of my football coaches talking to me about anything like that all-American or any type of award. All we talked about was just the very local stuff that occurred on the peninsula amongst the black schools. Now, having said that. I was surprised when I got called to the office and I was told that I had been voted the most outstanding football player award. Because again, I didn't know that such an award existed. And I think the full effect of that did not hit me until probably later in life. Whenever you're the first doing anything and it's something which is positive, it takes on a lot of significance.

And when you talk about a segregated environment like we grew up in in Virginia, that takes on even greater significance because that was not something we didn't have access to. We weren't on the radio, we weren't on television, and we got the third and fourth pages of the sports section. So, it wasn't as if we were given the same benefits as people athletes from Newport News High and Hampton High School.

To have some somebody out there, a group of people out there telling me that they recognize what I accomplished that particular year (in 1966) in football caused me to stand out above everybody else black or white. It was something which is greater than just me being named an all-American. It put some additional pressure and responsibility on me, which I accepted, to represent my family, my high school, and the Eastern District that I played in and the state of Virginia. Again, I accepted and wanted to carry that banner and make everybody from home proud.

**QUESTION 5: who delivered the message to you that morning when you were summons to the office?**

**Walter:** Well, the news came over the intercom. Uh, indicating that I was voted the most outstanding football player in the state, and then they asked me to come down to the office for that. And. But the actual silver bowl that I got for that was presented to me by coach Marv Levy, who was the head football coach at William and Mary at the time. This is the picture that appeared in the daily press. Coach Marv Levy. Coach Madden, coach Kane and coach Crittenden are in the picture with Walter.

**Walter:** That's I think we had a function in our cafeteria in which Coach Levy from William & Mary came to that and it was presented at that time. And so that was a big thing. And it was a big thing for the school, and it was a big thing for me too. I guess, even though I didn't think too much of it at the time, because the very next day I still had to go to class. I still had tests to do, you know, and I still had to play a basketball game somewhere. But again, I came to appreciate more once I was got old enough to fully understand the significance of that accomplishment.

**QUESTION 6: Have you ever thought about the standard that you set for some of the other great Huntington quarterbacks? Lynn with Cosby, Herman Green, Alphonso Samuels to mention some of the other great Huntington QBs.**

**Walter:** I wouldn't say that I set the standard because there was somebody who played before me about five years before me.

I think about Theodore Ted Holman who played at Huntington in the early 60's and ended up going to Syracuse to play football there and they gave him an opportunity to play quarterback. I did several things on the field that I did because of him. But you can imagine in nineteen sixty-two (1962) the black quarterback, playing even at Syracuse? He was not going to be given the opportunity, but it was Theodore Ted Holman. Timmy Holman was a left-handed quarterback, and he threw the tightest spiral of a football at the high school level. He was the best that I had ever seen in the area until Michael Vick came along. I admired Timmy because of that. I started doing things with my left hand because of Timmy Hollman. And I believe that he was the one that set the standard for quality quarterback play at Huntington High School.

## Undergraduate Years

**QUESTION 6. As a star former high school quarterback, how did you view your ability to perform in that position at the University Minnesota compared to the other potential quarterbacks on the roster?**

**Walter:** In many regards, I may have made the wrong choice in coming to Minnesota as a quarterback. I came to Minnesota as a quarterback and in large part because Minnesota had a demonstrated history of playing black quarterbacks, whereas other schools, white schools had not. And there was always this thing out there that the white schools were very, very quick to switch black athletes from the quarterback position to another position because of this notion that blacks did not have the mental aptitude to play quarterback. But Minnesota had shown that that was not a problem.

But the problem that I had, and I didn't realize at the time was that I chose a school that played black quarterbacks, but the offense was geared to running and not passing. That meant they wanted running quarterbacks. So that was the number one problem, whereas in high school I was looked upon first as a passing quarterback, although I ended up leading the team in rushing with maybe about 500 yards in Rushing.

And the second reason why my selection may not have been the best was I chose the school where it gets terribly cold climate which is not the best place for a passing quarterback or a very, very skilled quarterback.

I had other options and the school that I like the best was Southern California. In hindsight, many people suggested that would have been the better option for me because of the warm weather. The weather component would have been satisfied, but I still would have been more of a management quarterback at Southern Cal. Why, because they had O.J. Simpson in the backfield and you're not going to pass the ball too much with O.J. in the backfield and you're not going to pass the ball too much as a rule at Southern California at that time because the program was built around making sure they had tailbacks that were all-Americans. So, Minnesota was a place that I chose because of Sandy Stevenson who was black, was their starting quarterback. But in today's world, would I have chosen Minnesota? Not likely, in large part because of the cold weather.

**QUESTION 7. Please share your view of coaches, during your era, at majority colleges / universities not giving star / talented, former high school, black quarterbacks an opportunity to continue in that position? Black quarterbacks habitually changed to wide receiver or defensive back**

**Walter:** Well, that was something that I kind of alluded to in the last question. And that was society. I didn't mention this, but society in the mid-sixties was not ready for blacks. And when I say not ready, it was because in this culture, in this

country, racism existed, even in your northern and western states. Having a black leader at that leadership position of quarterback was not something that was well received at all. And not to mention in the southwest and south. It was just simply not happening whatsoever. So, they are playing the quarterback position, and typically switched to other positions. Minnesota gave me the opportunity to play quarterback, and I would say they gave me a fair opportunity to play quarterback. I simply did not adjust well with the type of system that they had in place for the passing quarterbacks especially with the black quarterbacks who were basically running QBs

And so, I look upon my football career as being very, very successful because of all the different things that I achieved at the different positions I played. But still, I was very disappointed in my lack of success at quarterback at Minnesota. And again, the lion's share of that rests with me rather than with anybody else.

**QUESTION 8: You spent time in NFL. What was that experience like?**

**Walter:** On my experience with the NFL, it occurred after law school. And that was because I wasn't drafted, and I chose to go to law school first. But my experience with the Minnesota Vikings, where I signed as a free agent in 1974, was what I would consider one of my best experiences, in large part because of the way in which Coach Grant Bud Grant ran the team. He ran the team like a professional organization. It was a well-organized machine. He was someone who retained assistant coaches and he gave a lot of responsibility. But everybody on that field knew absolutely knew who the person was who ran that football team. Nobody for a moment thought an assistant coach ran the team. Everybody saw Bud Grant as running the team, and he was someone who didn't tolerate, a lot of stupidity. He was about business. And when you went on the football field, you did your business.

Now I was I was the last person cut before the Green Bay opening season game, which showed that I had the talent even after 3 plus years out of football while attending law school, to play at the professional level. I signed another contract with the Vikings the following year. They had to place me on waivers first before I could report to camp and the Chicago Bears picked me up. And the new head coach there was Jack Pardee, the former linebacker for the Washington Redskins. Now that was one of the absolute worst athletic experiences I had in my life.

To me, that was a football team being coached by someone who did not have control of the team like Bud Grant had control of the Vikings. I did not enjoy my time in Chicago, even though Walter Payton was a rookie at the time, didn't like the idea that I had to go to Chicago as opposed to staying in Minnesota. I asked if I could stay in Minnesota, but the general manager told me I had to come to Chicago, otherwise I couldn't play football. So, I went there, not happy, and then with a coach that I thought did not have control. I was released before preseason

started. And I was OK with that. I had the capability of being able to play. Instead of having to go to Canada at that point, I chose just to use my law degree and begin the practice of law. But the experience that I had in pros was bittersweet in the sense that I would have loved to have been able to continue to maintain a professional career in football. By having tried it, told me that I knew I had the skill set to be able to play, but that circumstances beyond my control just simply didn't allow that to happen.

## **Law School and Legal Career**

### **QUESTION 9: What was your purpose in entering the field of justice?**

**Walter:** It was just simply a friend of mine who had played football with me, and he was one year in front of me, suggested that I take the law school entrance test to give myself options in the event I did not have a professional football career. And the recommendation caused me to take the law school entrance exam and to ultimately be admitted into the University of Minnesota's Law School. And it led my decision to go to law school rather than sign a free agent contract with the NFL or to sign the contract with the Canadians. My preference was to go and play professional football either in the United States or Canada and use law school as a bargaining chip to get more money as a free agent and with the Hamilton Tiger Cats in Canada. So ultimately, I did not get the money I asked for, so I ended up having to go to law school instead of continuing to play football directly out of college.

### **QUESTION 10: Was being a Black Judge a huge pressure on your shoulders?**

**Walter:** After having played in front of one hundred and two thousand and ninety-eight thousand one hundred and two thousand at University of Michigan and after having played against ninety-eight thousand people at Ohio State and playing football and basketball in the Big Ten, you know, being the black judge was not pressure for me, so no, I didn't sense any pressure on me because of being black. We also had black judges in Minneapolis and St. Paul, so it wasn't an odd thing to be a black judge. I do think black people in general sense a greater amount of pressure, and some of which is real, and some of which is self-imposed because of this belief that you always must do better than others who are doing it because you feel that you're more scrutinized than others. And sometimes that is the case in every aspect of life. That may not be the case, but nevertheless we perceive that to be the case and put that pressure on ourselves. But no, I would say that was probably the best and most enjoyable job I've ever

had in my life. I loved it feel I did a real good job at it and I'm happy that I was given the opportunity to do it because my skill set was ideally suited for that.

**QUESTION 11: How did your sports accomplishments help you excel in your career as Assistant City Attorney and District Court and Unemployment Law Judge?**

**Walter:** Well, preparation again, I mean, anybody who has played high school football or beyond understands the importance and preparation. And anybody who is working in a job in which they are successful. They understand the significance of preparation and what happened with athletics is there is a tremendous amount of preparation that goes into being an athlete at a big-time level. Once you get into your DNA, there is a sense and habit that you must prepare for everything.

So, all the tools that I learned as an athlete at high school and in college and at the professional level translated, helped me move to this notion of preparation as a trial lawyer, as a transactional lawyer and as a judge. You just can't fall out of the bed and do your job. You literally must prepare, so if you have a trial as a trial lawyer, you're going to have to know every detail of the case, the facts and the law, and you don't get that without having to prepare. When you're having to go in front of the jury. You need to prepare for that because you need to know the facts and the law in your case like you know your name. That is preparation. That's what sports is all about, team play is preparation, so everything about being in sports helped prepare me for every other thing that I've done in my life and that includes being a father. That includes the relationships that I have. You have to work on it, and you have to develop a game plan for everything that you do, and you have to execute that game plan. Learning how to do that comes from in large part sports.

**Family Life and other interests**

**QUESTION 12: What do you want to share about your family life? What is Walt the father like?**

**Walter:** Well, my father was a was a disciplinarian, and he had visions of wanting his kids to do well, and he made it clear to us in several ways that failure was not an option, and that we had to be successful and be good people. And if we didn't, he had ways through his almighty leather belt to impress upon us where we were coming up short. I'm proud of my family, my siblings and I my youngest brother passed when he was nine months. So, I ended up being the youngest and was the beneficiary of four people in front of me. And they kind of charted paths for

each other and ultimately me. That clearly told me that I had to do some things. Keep in mind you're talking about two sisters with a PhD, one sister with a master's and my brother was someone who was a medical technician in the Air Force, so there was success in my household, despite two parents with probably about a fourth-grade education apiece. Despite that, my father made it clear his expectations. And we followed those expectations. Those were the same expectations that I placed on my three kids. And it was extremely important that they understand as kids growing up, that they had an obligation to do certain things to be successful and failure was not an option. And I'm very, very happy to know that all three are doing quite well. And while they didn't like it while they were growing up, that certain parameters were given to them, they now have made it very clear that they were very, very appreciative of the guidance. And the tough love that they were given as part of their childhood.

**QUESTION 13: Why did you return to the area to help coaches?**

**Walter:** Coach Madden the person who coached me in football just one day when I was home, asked me if I would just stop by practice and help a quarterback who was trying to learn the running shoot. And because he was someone I respected and he was someone who played a part clearly in my successes at Huntington, I said sure. And that one simple question ultimately led to my arranging my schedule to take a break from my legal work, my family obligations here in Minnesota over a 13-year period or for 13 consecutive years to come back for three weeks every summer to try to help various coaches with the quarterback position primarily and other positions.

Secondarily, and those coaches would have been starting with Coach Madden, then your head coach Bacote, then you had Steve Asley and then you had Coach Freeman. I would over to Smithfield on several occasions to help Joe Bugs who was the coach at Smithfield. And I did these things in most cases because these coaches were people that I knew from Huntington. It all started as one simple request. And then it then morphed into that 13-year obligation. And that was because they were friends of mine, and I thought I had some type of background that could be beneficial to those people.

**QUESTION 14: How do you feel about athletes being role models? What standards should they be held to?**

**Walter:** Athletes without question are role models whether they like it or not. Any time you are in the public arena, you are a role model regardless of what you say or what you do, because when you're in the public arena, you're being watched. You're being watched because you're on television, you're being watched because you're in the new year on the radio or walking up and down the halls or streets. People are watching you and you may have heard people say, I'm not a



role model. Your parents are role models. Well, everybody is a role model. If someone looks up to you and you will never know who's looking up to you. So, athletes are role models, and we're not the only people who are role models, but we are in fact role models and any role model. There will be one person, two people or multiple people watching them, and they're watching them because there's something about them that kicks their interest. They are looking to see if what you're doing is something that they like and that they might want to emulate. And you got good people out there, good people out there who want good guidance and you have bad people out there who want good guidance and bad guidance. So, it becomes important for all role models. To conduct themselves so that you can be positive influences on people out there who are watching you because you can make a difference in the lives of a number of people without even knowing.

### **General Questions**

**QUESTION 15: Do you think as a city that HUNTINGTON was allowed to deteriorate to abolish the strong purpose and meaning of the success generated?**

**Walter:** The thought process behind continuing Huntington, Carver and Phoenix high schools as educational institutions in the city of Hampton and Newport News is the question, I think? Assuming that to be the case, I would say this, integration was not something that was well received in the white community in Virginia and other areas and in Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, in southern states, southwestern states or even in some northern states. That was just not something that white people wanted to do. They were comfortable living amongst themselves, educating themselves amongst themselves and dining with themselves... the whole nine yards. And once the government told the white community that integration was necessary, then I believe the governing bodies of the white communities did a number of things to show their frustration with being told they had to do things like that. And one of the things that they did was to shut down the black schools in Newport News Hampton. With the idea of one making it inconvenient for black kids to not go to the same schools they went to before and in their neighborhoods. To destroy or to end the legacy. The real strong, positive legacies that these black institutions had created in the black community, and they were successful because they were the ruling governing bodies. And to think that people like Ron Curry, your Allen Iverson's your Michael Vick's, your Shawn Lumpkins, would have been people who would have built upon the legacies of Huntington, Carver and Phoenix had the schools been able to remain in place. In many regards, closing them significantly hurt the black community because those all-black schools, hospitals etc. were significant components of the black community.

**QUESTION 16: In your view and based on prior police shootings of African Americans in the metropolitan Minneapolis community, would the police officers involved in the George Floyd case have been charged with murder and other crimes if the State Attorney General had not taken the case? The District Attorney's record does not support that he would have supported charging the officers.**

**Walter:** Well, he was charged with murder by the county attorney in Hennepin County. Mike Freeman, who was a classmate of mine in law school. He was charged with third degree murder. But he did not charge them. None of the police officers were charged with second degree murder, which is something that involves intent, whereas third degree did not involve that type of intent. And so, the county attorney did not and did not elevate the crime to second degree. Keith Ellison, the attorney general for the state, got it. Did indeed elevate the criminal charges to second degree murder, and obviously the jury convicted Chauvin of all the criminal offenses, including second degree. Now that? Are those convictions being on appeal right now? And. There is you don't know what's going to happen with the appeal of those convictions. It's clear that all of the convictions of third-degree murder on down. Will be upheld. I don't see any procedural problem. I mean, there may be a new trial possibility because one of the jurors did not disclose certain information that should have been disclosed and that could undo. That trial and make it be all over again. Because it is a legitimate argument that the defense has that. There was a juror who was asked the question, I believe, about whether that person and all the other jurors had participated in any kind of protests. Speaker2: Are involving police use of excessive force. And the answer that I believe this juror said was no. But it was disclosed later that this person may have been involved in a protest about excessive force. And if that had been known to the defense attorney. That defense attorney probably would not have wanted that person to serve on the jury and would have struck that person from being on the jury. Now that. Is a legitimate argument that can be made for? A retrial, because you have one person and you know, you can have a mistrial by only having one juror not believing things, but. That could result in a new trial and the chances of that happening, I'd say maybe as a 30 percent chance of a new trial. On that issue and that issue alone now as to the substance, I think there is a legitimate chance. Of a reversal. On the second-degree murder. Um, because of the level of intent that is required. I'm not saying I think the defense has a has a 50/50 chance of getting a complete reversal on that second-degree murder charge. No, the 50 50 means that the appellate courts could sustain it. Just as well as it can be reversed on that charge and that charge alone. And that's because the elements of second-degree murder may not have been met. Under the facts and circumstances in this case.