

STEADFAST:

A C O N V E R S A T I O N

W I T H

J P W A L K E R

STEADFAST

LOOKING FROM THE OUTSIDE IN, all is well in the life of JP Walker. An illustrious career, an immaculate social media presence, respectable sponsors, a lifestyle bookended with good surf and deep pow. The quintessential pro snowboarder. For 20 years, JP has been living the dream. Well, the one that he wants you to see. The man that helped shape snowboarding as we know it, who can claim 20 video parts, and who is one of the most successful pro riders ever, has creeping doubt that all but consumed him and started a spiral that sent him into the depths of his mind.

On December 23rd, 2013, JP broke the navicular bone and tore the spring ligament in his right foot, which basically removed all support in the arch of his right foot. While injury may be nothing new to JP, this one was different. It cracked his foundation. You see, there's more to JP than "The Don." There's more than chains, slang, and the man you see on screen. Beneath his carefully managed image is vulnerability that anyone can experience after trauma, especially if it's something that can completely alter life's path. This injury was about more than snowboarding. It was existential.

But the very thing he began to question is what got him through years of criticism and flux. He is determined to always be JP Walker, the snowboarder, no matter what. To him, this life is everything. Age and injury can never take away what JP has done for this simple sport that we all love, and there is no doubt that he will be here for many years to come.



THE ANNUAL

PHOTO: VILLE VAPPULA
RIDER: JP WALKER





PHOTO_ JEREMY JONES
RIDER_ JP WALKER



PHOTO_ ROB MATHIS
RIDER_ JP WALKER

INTERVIEW_ JENS HEIG

YOU TURNED 40 THIS YEAR RIGHT?

Yeah, I'm going to be 41 in October.

THERE AREN'T MANY 40-YEAR-OLD DUDES DOING WHAT YOU'RE DOING, JP.

Yeah, for sure [laughs].

YOU'RE STILL RIDING RAILS AT A REALLY HIGH LEVEL, DOING SOME PRETTY CONSEQUENTIAL SHIT. YOU LOOK AT SOME OF THESE GUYS IN THE NFL, OR THE NBA, AND 40 IS KIND OF THE LIMIT, RIGHT? HOW DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?

I'm not trying to think about that. Since I'm this age now I should just be doing heli trips with the squad and not trying to get in the streets, but that doesn't really motivate me. I'm not into making a career of just laying low and doing the fun shit. I've always been motivated on the progression side of things and I can still do it, so I still do it. I have companies that support me, I have a good squad of guys – obviously they're younger guys that I roll with but I get along with them. I have a lot of knowledge from doing handrail trips overseas which goes a long way. I can get the shot quicker and save energy here or there, or place a little extra snow to lessen the impact. Little tricks like that help me get through.

It's funny, because when I broke my foot a few years ago, that really fucked me up. I didn't know that it would end my season, but I knew it ended my filming season. I rehabbed for the rest of spring and summer and then I was asked to film the 2032 video. That was obviously a huge deal because ThirtyTwo is one of my biggest sponsors and that was a big movie for them because it was their 20-year anniversary.

IF I'M NOT DOING THIS, IF I'M NOT JP WALKER, THEN WHO THE FUCK AM I?

AND IT WAS YOUR 20TH VIDEO PART.

And it was my 20th video part, yes. So it was a lot of shit. They hired [Justin] Meyer and Videogress to produce it. We went out to film and I did my usual thing, went to the spot and warmed up. My foot still hurt but I thought I could do it, just take it day by day. It felt a little better every day, like maybe I actually could do this. We went to film a reservoir spillway — it was this big cement bank. I went out there and started building and it took two days to build it because I was out there by myself. I started tripping out, like “I don’t know if I can do this.” It’s the first shot for 2032 and I almost couldn’t even do it. I was basically crying the night before like I’m done. Just mentally finished. I have no confidence. I have nothing. It took getting in front of the camera to realize how shook I was from that accident. Full PTSD.

I got on a Skype call with Alan Goldberg, a sports psychologist. He kind of got me through the winter and then that next summer. I was with him about once a week to work through the PTSD I had about the whole scenario. All the pressure for the 2032 thing, 20th part, and wanting to live up to my previous standards. I’m telling him all this and he’s like, “How old are you?” “I’m 40.” He’s like, “Yeah, you’re fucking 40. You’re human.” When someone actually puts it in perspective for you, it’s an eye opener. I bawled my face off trying to get through this whole scenario of breaking my foot. It wasn’t just a foot thing. It came down to how everything adds up. I’ve obviously been hurt a lot of times, but finally it gets to a certain point where your body doesn’t want to do that anymore and [your mind] gets scared. I basically had a fucking meltdown. That’s some pretty major shit that happened with me. It’s not like I’m trying to keep it secret that I had to go see a shrink about this. I think it happens to a lot of people. It’s just a normal thing for a snowboarder who does the types of things. You do get hurt a lot, especially if you’re doing it for a long time. Not only getting hurt, but putting yourself in scary situations on the daily.

THIS IS WHAT YOU’VE DONE SINCE I GUESS ‘96.

This will be 20 years pro.

WAS THERE A FEAR ABOUT THAT CHANGING, OR THIS BEING THE CAREER ENDER?

For sure. All that stuff was in there and that’s what I talked to [Dr. Goldberg] about. If I’m not doing this, if I’m not JP Walker, then who the fuck am I? I think other pro athletes go through shit like that, like football players. You’re living this life in the spotlight and stardom. But I’m getting older and filming my 20th video part. If I can’t do it, not only do I fail at that but now I’m not even this person that I’ve been anymore. [Dr. Goldberg] helped me understand that it’s not like that. Just like a lot of pro athletes that are super critical of themselves, their performance and all this stuff. He helped me put a lot of that stuff into perspective. He’s an older guy from back East and I’m telling him how to do double corks and back lips and all this shit, telling him about tricks I’ve invented. And he’s listening, like he actually cares. But he said, “It’s damn sick that you did all this stuff, and you’re *still* that.”



PHOTO_ PASI SALMINEN
RIDER_ JP WALKER



PHOTO_ ROB MATHIS
RIDER_ JP WALKER



PHOTO_ PASI SALMINEN
RIDER_ JP WALKER



PHOTO_ VILLE VAPPULA
RIDER_ JP WALKER

GOING BACK TO THOSE EARLY YEARS. THERE WAS DEFINITELY A BOLD IMAGE THAT YOU PORTRAYED OF JP WALKER. HOW MUCH TRUTH WAS THERE IN THE FORUM JP WALKER, OR THE VIDEO PART JP WALKER?

At the time, a lot of that was hyped up. I guess I turn it on a little bit when the camera is pointed at me. Hit it with an "ugh, son" or something, instead of just standing there. But I always have been aware that there is more to professional snowboarding than just snowboarding. There's such a thing as an image. Some of the most successful guys in snowboarding, surfing, and skateboarding have an image as well that goes along with their riding. Like [Shaun] Palmer. I was listening to a lot of hip hop, still do. I liked that style of dress, started wearing that look more in my gear. Had a lot of money, bought a Benz. I've been doing this a long time, but I try to adapt and change with the times a little bit. I'm not fully switching all my threads and wearing tight jeans and stuff like that, but I do realize that there is the other aspect to it and try to be as professional as possible and make this shit look good.

THERE WAS A LITTLE PERIOD AROUND 2010 WHERE THE INTERNET KIND OF MADE YOU A TARGET BECAUSE OF YOUR IMAGE. HOW DID THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?

That all just helps drive it. But at the same time, when you see that stuff it does actually hurt. You could try to fire back but it's not going to help, it's just going to perpetuate it. People you don't even know, they don't know anything about you, saying this shit. I already knew that type of shit had probably been said about me but now people can see it, comment on it, and have back and forth banter. It can make you doubt yourself. It basically puts that thought in your head of like, "Maybe I *am* washed." You think about it for a little bit. That's a chip in your confidence; you don't want to be thinking about that kind of thing. "Maybe the fucking internet is right. Maybe I shouldn't fucking hit this rail." But I feel like I've repeatedly shut down the haters. I've seen them come and go, many a time. I'm still here.



PHOTO_ ROB MATHIS
RIDERS_ JP WALKER & SEAN KEARNS



PHOTO_ TK TK
RIDER_ JP WALKER



I'VE GOT SPONSORS THAT
STAND BEHIND ME AND ARE
STOKED ON ME.

I GUESS I'LL ASK YOU STRAIGHT UP, HOW MUCH LONGER DO
YOU WANT TO OR FEEL LIKE YOU CAN DO THIS?

I don't know man. With 2032, I just wanted to get through it. Before I really started talking to Dr. Goldberg I had feelings that I could be done after that. But then the thing with *Visitors* came up, and Meyer pitched it as this one-and-a-half year thing. I had fun filming with those guys for 2032 and that sounded less stressful. I never really set out, ever, to say I'm going to have this many video parts or I'm going to retire at this age. I always tried to focus on what's in front of me and do that thing only; to not get too far ahead of myself. That's where I am now. I obviously know that I'm 40 but I feel like I've taken pretty good care of myself. If anyone knows me, they know I don't like to party hard or anything like that. I try to stretch and do yoga, work out, and all this shit.

But I think about it more often. I remember when I turned 30, people are like, "You're 30, are you going to retire soon?" I feel good, I feel like I can do this stuff, I've got good connections with people all over the world, where spots are and have so much knowledge. I've got sponsors that stand behind me and are stoked on me. Why would I stop? Unless I mentally couldn't do it, like how I was feeling before I talked to the doc. It's honestly a day-by-day thing.

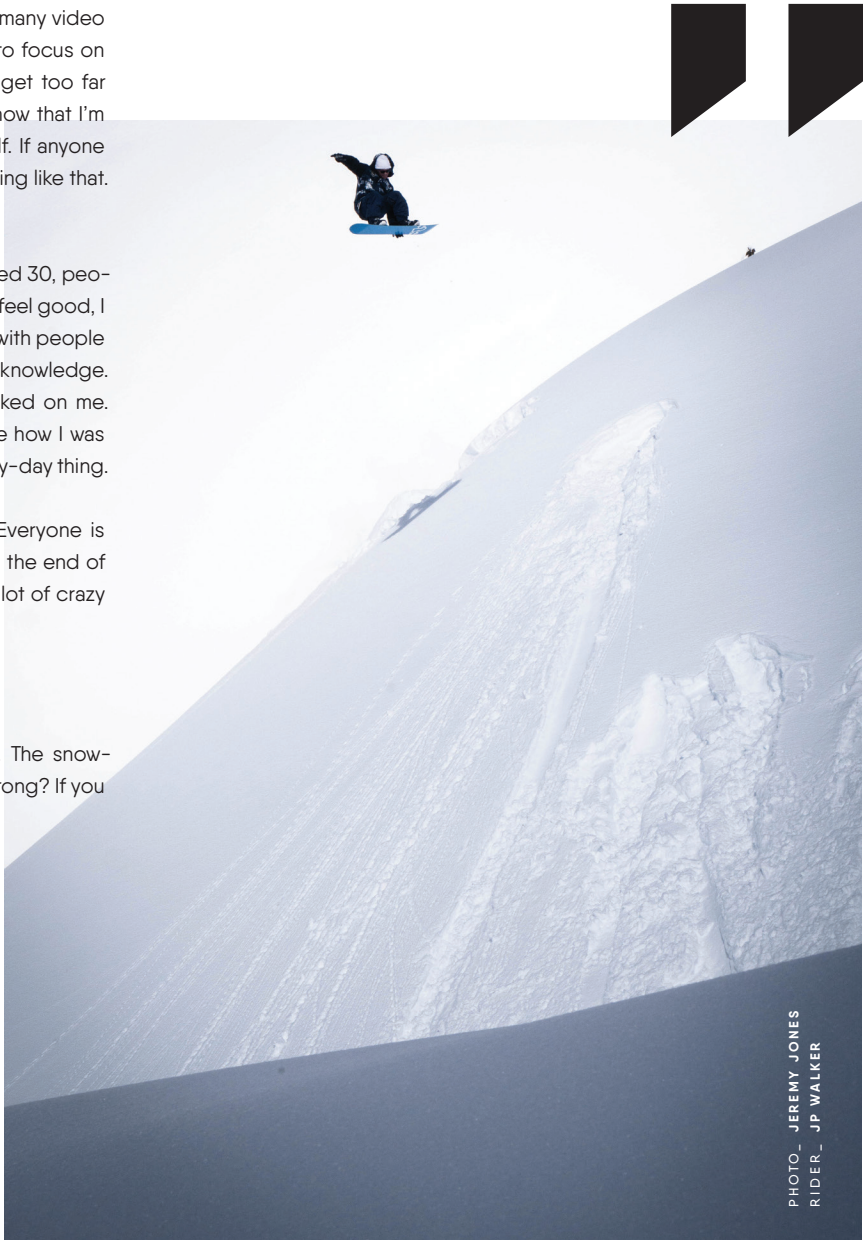
But I think it's good for people to know that stuff. Everyone is human. It's OK to be scared and have doubts. It's not the end of the world. On a more extreme note, there has been a lot of crazy things with athletes killing themselves.

THE BRAIN INJURIES.

Yeah, the brain injuries. There is a lot of mental shit. The snowboarding thing is really a mental game. Can you stay strong? If you want to go long at it, you kind of have to.



WHY WOULD I STOP?



PHOTO_ JEREMY JONES
RIDER_ JP WALKER



PHOTO_ PASI SALMINEN
RIDER_ JP WALKER