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## **His Job's a Grind - And He Loves It**

**CRAWDADS' RADIO VOICE KNEW AS KID WHAT HE WANTED TO DO**

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Hickory Crawdads catcher Neil Walker hopes one day to join the starting lineup of the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Hickory Crawdads shortstop Brian Bixler hopes one day to field true hops off the infield at Pittsburgh's PNC Park.

And Hickory Crawdads radio announcer Dave Friedman hopes one day to call the play-by-play action in Atlanta, San Francisco or some other major league city.

"I like it here in Hickory," Friedman said Sunday as he sat in the radio booth at L.P. Frans Stadium and prepared to broadcast an afternoon game between the Crawdads and the Greensboro Grasshoppers.

"I like it here, and I want to do the best possible job here," he added, as he looked out on a picture-perfect Sunday with clear skies and warm temperatures. "But like every player and every coach down on that field, I want to be in the major leagues."

A native of San Anselmo, a suburban community near San Francisco, Friedman was bitten by the broadcasting bug at a very young age.

"My first-grade teacher told my mom that I was the only kid in her class who knew exactly what he wanted to be," he recalled. "I didn't want to be an astronaut or a fireman. I wanted to be a sports announcer."

Friedman and his dad spent many spring and summer afternoons watching the Giants play in Candlestick Park or the Athletics in Oakland Coliseum. Many kids at ballparks are interested in everything but the game. He was interested only in the game and in describing the action.

"My dad must have told me a thousand times, 'You're not calling the game. Be quiet,'" Friedman said. "But, of course, I never would be quiet. I was practicing for my job."

While still in high school, Friedman began exploring the best collegiate options to prepare him for a career as a professional broadcaster. His choice took him from northern California to central New York and the sprawling campus of Syracuse University.

Friedman received his bachelor's degree in the spring of 2003, the same spring that the Orangemen captured the national men's collegiate basketball championship. Later that summer, he landed a part-time job on the broadcast crew of the International League's Charlotte Knights.

From there, it was just a short hop up the highway to a full-time job as the voice of the Crawdads in April of 2004. WMNC-FM (92.1, Morganton) broadcasts all 140 of the Crawdads' games; each of

these games can be found on the Internet as well.

Major league sports announcers fly in jet airliners, receive major league meal money and stay in luxury hotels. Minor league sports announcers log thousands of miles on buses, receive minor league meal money and stay in budget motels.

In addition, major league announcers typically work in two- or three-member teams, with a support staff of statisticians, engineers and researchers. Except for the help of an engineer in the Morganton studio, Friedman is pretty much a one-man show.

That means no bathroom breaks during the game, no vacation days during the season, which stretches from April to September, and certainly no opportunity to call in sick.

"It's a grind," said Friedman, whose youthful enthusiasm combines with a deep-seated love of baseball and an encyclopedic knowledge of the game's multitude of statistics to produce broadcasts that never lag, never drag and are interrupted only by an occasional technical malfunction. "But it's a grind that I love."

Friedman begins his preparation for a broadcast well before airtime, studying statistics and deciding what interesting facts he wants his audience to know.

The Hickory radio booth is directly behind home plate, just above the reserved blue seats. When Friedman opens the booth's windows, the crowd is literally right with him as he does his broadcasts.

"Sometimes, folks lean in the window and try to talk to me while I'm on the air," Friedman said. "I just point at my mike or the equipment and try to keep on working. But that's fun. I like being right here with the fans because I'm a fan, too."

Keeping the fans' interests in mind is one of the keys to being a successful sports announcer, Friedman said. "You have to remember that it's not 'announcing,' " he said. "It's a discussion. Good broadcasting is like two people sitting in the stands and talking about the game."

And talking is exactly what Friedman does during this Sunday afternoon broadcast, talking and talking and talking as the game stretches through one hour, two hours, three hours and on toward 3 1/2 hours.

In some ways, it is minor league baseball at its worst - lots of high pitch counts, lots of walks, lots of errors, lots of pitching changes. But even as the game drags, and the Crawdads lose, Friedman maintains his enthusiasm.

"Sometimes the games are better than the broadcasts, and sometimes the broadcasts are better than the games," he said.

This particular game ends - mercifully - after three hours and 23 minutes. As the fans file out of the ballpark, Friedman completes his post-game show.

He looks forward to a rare night away from the ballpark.

But the break will be a brief one.

It's Hickory vs. Asheville in a doubleheader on Monday. And the first pitch is less than 24 hours away.