

Featured: [Chicago Naked Bike Ride](#), [Old Town Art Fair highlights](#), [Beer events](#)

Search ChicagoNow... Search

Home Archive About



**Camp Deal:**  
\$100 for week of SPACE  
Summer Arts Camp



**Cubs vs Yankees:**  
\$125 rooftop tix, includes  
food and drinks

[Just for Laughs exclusive - Jim »](#)

## Just for Laughs exclusive - Neal Brennan interview

 [Scott King](#) on 06.13.11 at 1:45 PM | [no comments](#) | [Like](#) 10



[http://i.edn.turner.com/v5cache/TBS/Images/Dynamic/384/jfl11\\_nealBrennan\\_617x367\\_052520110445.jpg](http://i.edn.turner.com/v5cache/TBS/Images/Dynamic/384/jfl11_nealBrennan_617x367_052520110445.jpg)

Aside from being a stand up comic with appearances on *Lopez Tonight* and *Jimmy Fallon* in the past year, Neal Brennan was the co-creator of *Chappelle's Show*, and co-wrote the movie *Half Baked* with Dave Chappelle. Neal was also the director of 2009's *the Goods: Live Hard, Sell Hard* starring Jeremy Piven, Ed Helms, Ken Jeong, and Will Ferrell. Recently, he was a writer for the White House Correspondents' Dinner and got to meet President Obama.

Neal performs in the TBS Just for Laughs festival show: "Viva La Risa." You can see him perform in the "multi-cultural" show Friday, June 17th at Park West at 8:00 PM. [BUY TICKETS](#)

CAC: Did you start as a comic or a writer?

*NB: I actually didn't. I started as a doorman at a comedy club. My brother Kevin Brennan is a comedian. I used to hang out in clubs in the late 80's, I was in high school, with my brother. So I knew my way around the clubs, somewhat, so then I ended up working the door at a place called the Boston Comedy Club (in New York), which is no longer there. That's where I met Chappelle. An average show back in 91',92',93' was like Chappelle, Ray Romano, Jon Stewart. It was a good show, but no one was like, "Oh my God, did you see that line up?" Because they didn't know who they were. They were always really funny. I started pitching tags to people, like little jokes, and that sort of snowballed. There's an old adage that if you want to work somewhere, go and do it for free, which is basically what I*

Download now for a chance to win \$500 in CTA fare & prizes. Click here for rules and entry.

The ultimate app for those who really get around ...

# mobile

Get the **FREE** RedEye app for iPhone and Android

- CTA Train & Bus Tracker
- Missed Connections
- Taxi Catcher
- Bar & Restaurant Finder

Sponsored by:  

**NEW!** Recent ChicagoNow Photos

### Most Active Pages Right Now

40 viewing

[Don't Curse Your Child With A Weird Name - Little Kids, Big City](#)

38 viewing

[LeBron and Luongo Losing - How Fun It Is. Eh, Chicago? - Chicago Pain](#)

36 viewing

[A Letter to LeBron James - Offhanded Dribble](#)

35 viewing

[Final thoughts on Miami/LeBron/Dirk - Chicago Bulls Confidential](#)

21 viewing

[Do Ugly Men Make Better Lovers? - Six Brown Chicks](#)

powered by chartbeat

**ChicagoNow.com on Facebook**



ChicagoNow on Facebook

Like

did without knowing it was an old adage. I'm a know it all, so I couldn't help but go, "Hey great comedian, you know what you should say..." I think Chappelle probably wanted to punch me. In an interview one time, he said he hates when people do that, but with me he didn't mind it.



Neal with Dave Chappelle

[http://gossiphat.com/wp-content/plugins/wp-o-matic/cache/e82e6\\_5n6e6f.jpg](http://gossiphat.com/wp-content/plugins/wp-o-matic/cache/e82e6_5n6e6f.jpg)

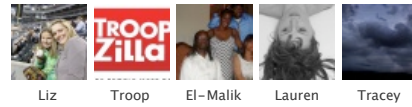
CAC: Now, I can't imagine any situation now where a guy would let someone give him tags who is just starting out or isn't even performing yet.

NB: Me and Dave were like friends, friends. Look man, to look at me, you wouldn't be like, "You know who's got some tags, that weird Urchin over there." I look like an Urchin. To call me an Urchin would be an insult to Urchins. So it was cool that guys like Dave listened. It was certainly a self-steem builder. I still didn't do stand up another decade or so. I did write, I got writing jobs out in LA. Based on my connections through people I met at clubs, I ended up writing for the game show Singled Out. That was my first job in show business. It was my first paid gig, so you're welcome America. And then I wrote for the show All That on Nickelodeon, and got nothing on, but I think it was just helpful in terms of that I was 20, 21 in a writer's room. So I was sort of not doing well, but if you're not going to do well, then the age 21 is the age to do it. Then Half Baked happened. And the way Half Baked happened is I had written another script and it was very good, but I had got a meeting with this producer, and they were like, "Just meet the kid, he's funny." So I went in and I was really funny with the producer and then about a week later, Chappelle was in there with the same producer and the producer was this guy Bob Simon.

CAC: You hear that a lot, that a comic got a TV or movie gig by "being funny" with a producer. What exactly does that entail?

NB: It's just personality based. A lot of it is just schmoozy, and it's a social business. A lot of getting a job, probably in every business, is, "Do I want this person around me, 8 hours a day?" In this case I impressed Bob enough. I was funny in the meeting, again I was 21, 22. I was basically just being a funny dude in a meeting. I was asking questions, he was asking me questions, and then a week later, completely coincidentally, Chappelle had a meeting with the guy. And he asked him, "Do you have any ideas?" And he was like, "Yeah, I have this idea for a weed movie that I'm going to write with a buddy of mine." They were like, "Who's your buddy?" He said, "Trust me, you've never heard of him." Because Dave's agents used to always say, "Get that guy away from you." He was like, "Trust me, you've never heard of him," they were like, "No, no try us," and he was like, "Neal Brennan." And they were like, "We love Neal!" So the punchline was Chappelle had never told me about this idea. So we had to cram. They were like, "Hey, how's your weed movie?" And it was like, "Good!" Meanwhile we didn't have a weed movie. Eventually we outlined it and put it together and it worked out.

18,202 people like ChicagoNow.



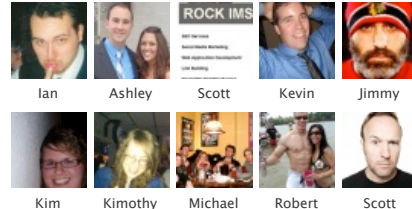
## Class Act Comedy on Facebook



Scott King Comedy on Facebook

Like

251 people like Scott King Comedy.



Facebook social plugin



[http://www.drugsplaza.com/movies/pictures/half\\_baked.jpg](http://www.drugsplaza.com/movies/pictures/half_baked.jpg)

CAC: When you guys were writing the movie, what steps did you take to make sure it was going to be more than just a stoner movie?

NB: *I don't know that we did make it more than that. Basically it's a stoner movie. I got to say, I'm not the biggest fan of the movie. There are parts of it where you can see, "Oh these guys ended up doing Chappelle's Show," but there's lots of parts of it I'm not that proud of and I wish we could have changed or whatever. But me and Dave were both movie nerds. I was going to NYU Film School when I was working at the comedy club, and he went to a Performing Arts high school. There was certainly a high level of shared sensibility. People think... The thing with me and Dave was that they would give 1 of us too much credit. They would go, "Neal's a genius and Dave is just a guy Neal tells what to say." And other people would go, "Dave's a genius and Neal is just his typist." Neither is true, but it hurts people to think that 2 people are talented. Whereas if 1 person is talented, then they can go, "Yeah, but screw that other guy." People like to be able to discount 1 person. Which was unfair to us. And me and Dave had a policy, I sort of saw that coming a long way away, so I said, "Hey, let's do ourselves a favor and not tell people who wrote what jokes."*

CAC: Was it industry people, like producers, just giving 1 of you guys the credit? Because I've heard comics say you two were this unstoppable comedy team.

NB: *But that's in hindsight. We were stoppable in 1998. If you don't believe me, ask Titanic, ask Good Will Hunting. That's who we opened against, Titanic, Good Will Hunting, and Goldeneye. Yeah, so then we really tanked. Then we ended up doing really well on video. But yeah, we got our heads handed to us.*

CAC: But everyone is going to remember it as a cult classic.

NB: *Yeah. But "cult classic" isn't good for much. People aren't going to hire you to make another unsuccessful movie that will eventually be successful. People want movies that are successful the first day. So that's the deal there. People may say we were this unstoppable team now, but trust me, I was coming right out of my Urchin phase and it was very stoppable. Jeff Ross once referred to me as Dave Chappelle's typist. 14-15 years ago, he doesn't know I know that. Somebody told me.*



Neal with Will Ferrell at the Goods premiere

[http://www.vegasnews.com/wp-content/uploads/8\\_12\\_09\\_goods\\_kabik-209-570.jpg](http://www.vegasnews.com/wp-content/uploads/8_12_09_goods_kabik-209-570.jpg)

CAC: I know you have family here, are you originally from Chicago?

*NB: Yeah, I spent part of my youth in Wilmette. I was there from 78' - 86.' I used to hang out a lot downtown, my other brother was an usher for Andy Frain. So he worked Wrigley. He worked the press entrance for the stadium, and he worked hockey and basketball. I've gone to innumerable Cubs games at Wrigley, and I got in for free. It was the 80's, so things were slightly more disorganized. This was before 911, where they would just let a 10-year old walk into a baseball stadium. I used to go to Bulls games before Michael Jordan was there, when it was just a cast of misfits, like Ronnie Lester and Quintin Dailey. There was a point when Dailey had allegedly raped a woman so people were picketing the games. It was great. Once Jordan came, then it was harder to get in because people wanted to go. I was there preseason in Jordan's first year, and I got his autograph when he was walking off the court during shootaround. And I saw 2 little girls ask him if he was Orlando Woolridge. Which I gotta think, never happened again. I saw the last time Michael Jordan was mistaken for someone else.*

Neal's set on Lopez Tonight

CAC: How much different is taping a live set for TV than doing a set in a club?

*NB: A set in a club is just go up there, do your best, and see what happens, and there is*

absolutely no pressure. Whereas doing a TV show, I always say it's like doing comedy at a higher altitude. First of all, there's so much pressure in that there's 8 cameras, there's an audience, and the TV audience is on the other side of the cameras, so you're sort of... not like talking over the cameras, but you have to get them that way. And you've never been on this stage before, which is always disconcerting because when I've never been on a stage before, I always worry I'm going to fall off it. I don't know if that's a common thing, but that's what it's like for me. And it's literally like, "3, 2, 1... My next guest is..." And you're like "Okay."

It's not up to you, when you go. And you have 4 and a half minutes, 5 and a half minutes to do well and you can't stop, you can't cough, you can't scratch your nose. There's nothing you can do. TV doesn't like humanity very much. They like polish. The bad part about TV sets is that they don't have the impact they used to. Meaning, the only thing that has happened in the last few years of stand up is Hannibal Buress did Fallon and got a writing job on SNL and 30 Rock, and Deon Cole did Conan and got a writing job for Conan. So it seems the only way TV sets can help you at this point is if you're a black guy who wants to be a writer. I'm kidding. But those are the guys whose income went up because of them doing these shows. In the 70s and early 80s, if you did the Tonight Show, and Johnny gave you the thumbs up, your life as you knew it was over. Whereas now, I say doing TV sets now is like doing a dirt bike demo, where all you can do is hope to inspire a young kid out there watchin, and you just try not to break your back while doing it. It's good to have something to look forward to, and a lot of pressure, which is fun. It makes you feel like you're progressing.

Neal with Tracy Morgan on *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*

CAC: I've heard the crowds are very far away when you're taping a TV set, is that true?

NB: Yeah. And the other thing is you can't hear yourself very well, where normally in clubs the speakers are right by you. It's definitely an adjustment. My Fallon is nowhere near as good as my Lopez. The best part of my Fallon, was I did panel with Tracy Morgan, who was the other guest, and me and Tracy are friends. So it was funny. I think that's online somewhere. That was really really funny because I was more relaxed. Doing stand up on Fallon was hard for me because I went out, and it was the day the Goods was opening, and I knew it wasn't doing well. I was trying to compartmentalize and not worry about it, so it was a little trying. It was like if my wife was sick or something, and the Goods was like, "Go out there and kill for us, Daddy." I did fine, but the panel was way better.



Neal and Seth Meyers

[http://25.media.tumblr.com/tumblr\\_l59iys40Q31q6392001\\_500.jpg](http://25.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_l59iys40Q31q6392001_500.jpg)

*CAC: You were a writer for the White House Correspondents' Dinner, not only did you get to meet the President, but after you got home you realized you met him as the Seals were going to kill Bin Laden.*

*NB: So Saturday was the White House Correspondents Dinner, Seth Meyers is a very good friend of mine, a bunch of us wrote jokes for him. One of the things that was funny was like, "We have to find out if Obama is gonna do that joke." It was almost like a comedy competition. What trick is he going to do before Seth comes out? Because Seth had to follow him. So it turns out we didn't have too much crossover material. I was really impressed with Obama's material. He had good jokes, Judd Apatow wrote 1 of them, but mostly it was the guys who write his speeches. Which is disappointing because not only can they write speeches, but they can write jokes. One of them actually used to do stand up. Jon Lovett is his name. So Seth went on and crushed, which was awesome. The fun was speaking truth to power. I wrote that joke "Obama, you're unbeatable, but you know who would beat you? You in 2008." And it's so fun to know that he's going to hear it. I had another one that was too mean, which was, "I think of your re-election campaign the same way I think of a troubled cousin, I wish you all the luck in the world buddy, but I'm not giving you money again." It would have been just a little too sharp. Seth made great cuts. Seth wrote a lot of his own, really great jokes.*

*CAC: I think a good trait of a comedy writer that you have is you knew how to write for Seth....*

*NB: With Seth, and with Dave, the benefit of writing for someone your friends with, is that, as a friend, I can say, "Dude, do that joke." And they listen to me. Whereas if I was a writer for them it just becomes this weird, "No, I don't trust you." In the case of me and Dave, we had a history of suggestions working or not working. And then with Seth, part of it is my success with Chappelle's Show, but I've been friends with him since Chappelle's Show, so I think he trusts me as a comedian and just a comedy guy. People always go, "Why don't you write for a show?" Because I don't want to not be in charge of what gets on. I just don't want to have to be at the whims of somebody I don't know very well. I don't mind if it's the whims of Dave or the whims of Seth, in essence it's their funeral because they're the performer. So it's like, "Yeah man, whatever you feel comfortable with." But even within that construct they are still open to influence.*

*CAC: What else happened the night of the dinner?*



*Neal meets President Obama and the First Lady*

*NB: Beforehand there was like a drinks thing, a cocktail thing. So it's in a small room in the basement of the Hilton. It's not an especially nice room. I told somebody, "It's like if you're staying at a Radison, it would be like the hospitality room where they keep the juice and donuts in the morning." And they have a little bar set up and there's about 100 people in there, and it's me, Seth, John Mulaney, Doug Ales, Alex Baze, Mike Shoemaker, and Seth's family, and then there's like David Remnick, the editor of the New Yorker, Jon Hamm, from Mad Men. Sean Penn was in there. Rupert Murdoch was in there. That was one where I was like, "What?" So at a certain point, we all hang out for like 20 minutes, half an hour, they lock the doors, the President and the First Lady come in through a side door, and they immediately stick them behind red velvet ropes. But it felt more like Madame Tussauds, where we were like, "Ah, they're very real looking." So everybody lines up, all these bigwigs line up. And it wasn't like a bunch of civilized people lining up, it was more of like a bum rush. Like when they open a new line at the grocery store and there's a bottleneck, that's what happened, but the bottleneck was like Rupert Murdoch, Jon Hamm, David Remnick. And we were all in line and we're trying to figure out what we're supposed to call Michelle Obama. The thing is, you go up, you introduce yourself and you get your picture taken. So everybody goes, Hamm went before me, then it was my turn. And I had heard a long time ago, that Michelle was a fan of Chappelle's Show. So I was like, "I'm just going to exploit that." So I get up to the President and I say, "Hey man," which I'm pretty sure you're not supposed to call him. I said, "Hey man, my name's Neal Brennan and I co-created Chappelle's Show with Dave Chappelle." As I recall it, he kind of bridled and said, "Oh, man, we love that show. That has to be considered one of the greatest shows of all time." Which I gotta say, felt pretty good. So he goes, "Michelle, this guy created Chappelle's Show with Dave Chappelle." So Michelle comes over and says, "Oh, we were so upset when it went of the air." And I go, "How do you think I felt?" So we had a little chortle. And then we're taking the picture, and the whole thing is just so odd. That day Obama had gone to Alabama for the tornado, then he went to Cape Canaveral, I believe he saw Gabby Giffords, then he went to Miami, did a commencement address, then he comes back to DC, had to put a tuxedo on, take pictures with a bunch of weirdos, and then he has to do stand up. Now for a normal person, that would be a month that they would never stop talking about for the rest of their lives. They'd be like, "Did I ever tell you about the month I went to Alabama, Florida, gave a commencement address, then did stand up for all these people..." Whereas for him, it's just a day, and he had a hit out on Bin Laden. So he's waiting for that to hear, and he still has time to be personable. He understands that while he'll almost immediately forget about meeting me, I'll never forget it. You know, and everyone there will never forget it. He's performing his job as the President. So when people go, "Oh Obama's just a little too cool." No, sometimes that's how cool you have to be. That's a job that requires the utmost cool. Particularly that day, I can't think of anything more stressful than to do all that stuff. So the idea that he's too cool is hogwash. So all these people are lining up to get a picture with him like he's Santa Claus. I do a joke like, "What do you want for Christmas young man?" "Tax cuts." People are lining up and I go, "This is all so weird, man. Do you ever get used to this?" And he goes, "Nope. But I just can't up and retire like Dave Chappelle did." Which is incredibly funny, and put it in the context of all the stuff that's going on in his life. Like if I had 2 of those things, I'd be snapping at people all day. As would most people. So the idea that, "He's a little too professorial..." Good, I'm fine with that. And as I walked away I said "Yeah man, don't go to Africa." To me it was like a perfect 6-line exchange, and he kind of laughed, then I got a picture like a week later that I can forward to you (see above) of me meeting him and of him pointing to me and looking at Michelle saying, "This*

guy created Chappelle's Show with Dave Chappelle." And it's just crazy. After I had the interaction with Obama, I told Hamm about him saying Chappelle's Show was one of the greatest shows of all time, and Hamm, I hope jokingly, said, "Yeah, he said the same thing to me about my show." Then he goes out and crushes, stand up-wise. And the great thing was, afterward, having written some of the jokes for Seth, it's a room full of journalists. So when you say, "I'm a writer," it has cache. Whereas in Hollywood if you say you're a writer, they're like, "Okay, get out of here." Whereas in DC when you say, "I'm a comedy writer," they're like, "Oh my God, how do you do it?" And there was a big party afterward, a Vanity Fair party, that we almost didn't get into because I made the mistake of saying, "We're the writers." And Vanity Fair is where it gets shoubizy again. So once I said we were the writers they were like, "Okay, go stand over there." So we got in then I ended up talking to Carmello Anthony for 45 minutes. Then I was finished with him and I turned around and talked to Gene Sperling, one of Obama's economic advisors, for another 45 minutes. It was like my brainscape come to life. It was like, "I like Basketball and Politics, so I want to talk to you, Carmello and then I'm going to talk to you, Gene." Then we ended up shooting a promo for the Espys with Carmello, which Seth is hosting. He was really funny. Seth wrote him and I directed him.



Neal directing the Espy promo with Carmello Anthony

In Part 2, Neal talks more about the White House Correspondents Dinner, his Just for Laughs show, and what happened with Chappelle's Show and did it end a close friendship between him and Dave?

\*Coming soon\*

[Neal's Facebook Page](#)

[Neal's Twitter](#)

[Neal's WhoSay Page](#)

Tagged [All That](#), [Barack Obama](#), [Bill Burr](#), [Boston Comedy Club](#), [Carmello Anthony](#), [Chappelle's Show](#), [Comedy Central](#), [Conan](#), [Dave Chapelle](#), [Dave Remnick](#), [David Remnick](#), [Deon Cole](#), [Ed Helms](#), [Espy](#), [Espys](#), [First Lady](#), [Gabby Giffords](#), [Gene Sperling](#), [George Lopez](#), [George Lucas](#), [Half Baked](#), [Half-Baked](#), [Hannibal Burrell](#), [Hilton hotels](#), [Jeremy Piven](#), [Jimmy Fallon](#), [John Lovett](#), [John Mulaney](#), [Jon Hamm](#), [Just for Laughs](#), [Just for Laughs 2011](#), [Just for Laughs Chicago](#), [Ken Jeong](#), [Lopez Tonight](#), [Mad Men](#), [Madame Tussauds](#), [Michelle Obama](#), [Navy Seal Team 6](#), [Neal Brennan](#), [New Yorker](#), [Nickelodeon](#), [Osama Bin Laden](#), [panel](#), [Park West](#), [President Obama](#), [Rupert Murdoch](#), [Saturday Night Live](#), [Sean Penn](#), [Seth Meyers](#), [Singled Out](#), [sketch comedy](#), [sketch show](#), [SNL](#), [Steven Spielberg](#), [talk show panel](#), [TBS](#), [Team 6](#), [the Espy's](#), [the Goods](#), [the Goods: Live Hard Sell Hard](#), [the Hilton](#), [the New Yorker](#), [the Radison](#), [Tracy Morgan](#), [Usama Bin Laden](#), [Navy Seals](#), [Vanity Fair](#), [Viva La Risa](#), [White House Correspondents Dinner](#), [Will Ferrell](#), [Yoda](#)

## Recommended

- [Find out how one woman paid off \\$30,000 to become debt-free.](#)
- [This is Why You're Single](#)
- [Just for Laughs exclusive - Dave Attell](#)

## Recent Posts

- [Just for Laughs exclusive - Neal Brennan interview](#)
- [Just for Laughs exclusive - Jim Norton interview](#)
- [Just for Laughs exclusive - Dave Attell interview Part 2](#)
- [Just for Laughs exclusive - Dave Attell Interview](#)

## Subscribe

Subscribe by email  Go



[Atom](#)



[RSS](#)