

## 2002 – A NEW BEGINNING -

It's that time again. I know it is spring training, because it got into the mid-80s today. We've been struggling a little bit thus far, but I know this team will be ready to go when the bell rings on April 2. I've been around this bunch too long to think otherwise. It's funny, because I hear the same things every year about this club. I can't tell you how many times I got asked last year by reporters, friends and fans how it was going to feel when we didn't get it done. There were so many naysayers that I stopped keeping count. If you check out my journal entry from around that time last year, I told everyone to keep the faith. This team has just been there too, too many times. I consider it an honor to be a part of this team. There are so many quiet leaders on this team. So many professionals. It just never ceases to amaze me how this team shows up when it counts.

Speaking of professionals, we certainly lost one in Brian Jordan. I considered BJ to be one of the classiest guys in this game. He leaves it on the field every single day. He was such a great presence in our lockerroom. The last two or three years, he was one of the guys that carried this team at times during the season. I remember in 1999, when I won the MVP, I thought BJ was the team MVP during July and August. Same thing last year. He lead this team in the way that you love to see a guy lead - on the field. We will miss Brian as a friend, teammate and person. Package that with losing Odalis Perez, who has the ability to be a frontline starter, and is a good guy himself, and you have quite a void to fill.

Yet, if you had to give up Brian Jordan and Odalis Perez, you would hope to get a player that has the ability and presence of Gary Sheffield. Sheff is simply one of the best players in the game. John Schuerholz said that "with all due respect to Chipper, but Gary Sheffield is one of the most feared hitters in the game." John, I'll second that statement. Sheff has been everything we expected and more. He has such a good approach at the plate, and he is just an awesome talent. I am looking forward to hitting in front of (or behind) him for an entire year. Should be fun to have him wearing the red, white and blue instead of saying "I hope I see the ball he hits down to me at 3B."

I've gotten a ton of questions about being moved to LF. Did the team ask me to move? Did I ask to be moved? Would I move back? Am I mad? Let me tell everyone this - I am concerned about one thing and one thing only. I want this team to win. If we are a better team with me in LF and Vinny Castilla at 3B, and that is what Bobby thinks will give us the best shot to get back to the World Series, then lets do it. People think that the numbers, the money and personal achievements are the things that are important to athletes, and specifically baseball players. These things don't motivate me. These things don't move me. The only thing that most players care about is winning. The success of my team is the ONLY thing that matters to me. It is why I play this game. Athletes are proud and competitive, and most can't stand one thing - losing. Winning is what drives athletes, not money or numbers. I want everyone to understand that the move to LF was what we, as a team, decided was best for the one and only thing that matters - our team. I am thoroughly excited about this year, and playing LF. People ask me "well, what about your legacy at 3B? You can be the only 3B in

history to hit certain numbers." Yes, I can. But, I can also be part of team that has won 11 division titles in a row, and can win 2 or more World Series. If I can do that, that is legacy enough for me.

I hope everyone and their families are well. My best to each of you. Cheer hard for those Braves and we'll catch up soon.

- Chipper Jones