

A DECADE OF BASEBALL -

Sorry it has been so long since I last wrote. Time goes by so fast now. I look at my boys and can't believe how big they have gotten. I can't believe that I will be 31 years old on April 24, with two sons. It seems like yesterday that I was their age.

When I last wrote, we were in the midst of our 11th straight division title run. The ultimate result was very disappointing, and I was certainly disappointed in my own performance, but you simply cannot question the remarkable run that we have had. I'm almost glad that I am writing this now, because it has given me time to reflect on what transpired over the course of last season. In May, we were 19-21, and I wasn't sure we were going to make the playoffs. We ended up winning the division by 19 games and were as confident as ever that we would get back to the Series. We simply ran into a very good team playing extremely well at the time. They beat us. Their best beat our best. No excuses. I would like to have an excuse, but we don't. The reason I'm glad I am writing this now is because I would have been much more doom and gloom if I had written this last October. Looking back now, I realize that I have had the fortunate honor of never playing on a team that has not made the playoffs. That is simply unbelievable as I head into my 10th year in the big leagues. I've said it before, and I'll say it now - I am extremely thankful to be a part of this franchise. I truly understand what it means to be an Atlanta Brave.

The offseason was great for me. I got to spend a lot of time with the boys, Sharon and my parents. Spent a ton of time at my home on the ranch. Spent some time travelling. Sharon and I went to Vegas and renewed our wedding vows. That was a great time. Got to have a lot of friends out to the ranch and had some outstanding hunting. We always have a great time. I really am in my element down there. Family, friends and the great outdoors. Can't ask for much else.

My buddy, Clint, was working the ranch this offseason. Clint is a AA player with the Pirates and played at Stetson University where my dad coached for several years. We worked out almost everyday that I was there, and dad was the same old human pitching machine. I felt really good heading into spring training, and I swung the bat pretty well. I understand that the guys can throw hitters very differently in spring training, so that won't necessarily translate into a fast start, but that that won't worry me too much. I usually start slow and end strong, so I can't expect much will change on that front.

Got a chance to visit Mizuno International in Japan during the offseason. Be sure to check out the article from ChopTalk on the trip. I went with my agent/buddy, B.B., as well as two guys from Mizuno USA (Jim Guadagno and Mark Daniels). Jim used to be with the Braves as a scout, so it was good to have him with us on the trip. We visited the Mizuno headquarters in Osaka, travelled to Kyoto to see some sights, and went to Yoro to visit the "Master Craftsman" of Mizuno bats. That was quite an experience seeing Kaboto make a bat from a huge piece of ash wood. I really enjoyed the whole trip.

Well, as I write this, we are now 8-8. People are again predicting the downfall of

the Braves. I feel confident that we will be there in the end. I feel confident that we will have this team in shape to make the push down the stretch. We will miss Glav, Lock, Mill, Spooney, Hamm, and Rem. It is going to be strange not having those guys in the clubhouse everyday. But, that seems like the nature of baseball, and that nature has now hit the Braves. We will simply regroup, go forward with the great new arms we have, and try to compete again for another title. Everyone hang in there, just smile at the negative spirits out there, and we'll see you in September.

Remember, it is a 162 game season. Take care.

- Chipper Jones