

## ANOTHER SEASON BEGINS -

Well, if you believe what you read and hear, THIS will be the year that the Braves are dethroned. Of course, I guess we have been hearing this for 4 or 5 years now. Yes, we have some incredible holes to fill, and I'm not sure that those holes can even be filled. No, this team is not ready to lie down and give the division to the Marlins, Phillies, Mets and Expos. I'm not sure you can replace a Gary Sheffield and Greg Maddux. I'm not sure you can reasonably expect someone to have the year Javy had last year. But, we have added one of the best young players in the game in J.D. Drew, we have a rookie that is going to make some waves in Adam LaRoche, we have one heck of a pitching staff with Hamp, Russ, John and Horacio. Our pen is shaping up to be a good one, and don't forget that we have the grittiest, most professional and best closer in the game with Smoltzie. DeRo is ready to step up and deserves the chance to play everyday. Estrada is a good catcher from what I've seen. He can handle a staff and has a chance to be a good, offensive big league catcher. I guess in sum, I just want everyone to know that we feel good about this year, and our goals of winning the division and getting back to the Series have not changed.

The off season has been going great. I feel like I'm stronger than I've been in a while (since '99). I hope I can duplicate those numbers, don't you? I'm hitting with dad down at the ranch quite a bit, and I am going to concentrate on getting a little more fleet of foot in spring training. I would really like to be able to create some things on the basepaths this year. I feel like that was a big part of my game that I have been missing. We are going to be a different team this year, focusing on pitching, defense and creating runs. I want to be ready for that strategy.

I've done quite a bit of hunting. I got a chance to go to Kansas to hunt with RealTree Outdoors with Jeff Foxworthy. That was great, but it was pretty darn cold. My blood is getting real thin in my old age, I guess. I have harvested quite a few bucks at the ranch this year and we continue to build quite a deer management program out at the Double Dime. We are really excited about starting to sell hunts out there next year.

The golf tournament went great. Foxworthy performed at the banquet/auction, and we were able to raise about \$150,000 for various charities and organizations. All the volunteers have done an unbelievable job with putting that thing together. It couldn't happen without them. A lot of the guys played in the tournament. DeRo, Damian, Glav, Lemmer, Hubbie, Buttsy, Morty, Gua, Smoltzie, and a ton of other guys were there. I really owe them a big thanks for doing that for me.

Everyone hang in there. The Braves aren't going anywhere. We plan on being right there at the end. If our young players mature like we think they are, at year's end, if we are in the mix, I really like our chances. Keep the faith and know that we are going to do everything we can to keep that Division Title in Atlanta for the 12th straight year.

Take care. Chipper Jones