

NOT THIS YEAR -

As I look back at the last three season's journal entries at the beginning of the year, I see that each year the media, some fans, and particularly the Braves' opposition's fans are always calling that particular year as the season that the Braves would not win the division. This year, we started 8-8 and some of our own fans and the local community were saying that there was no way that this team would win the division this year. I wish I would have clipped some of the emails, editorials, and letters written by fans. They went on to say "how old we were" and "how we had not kept up with the newly revamped Phillies." Well, there is no doubt that the Phillies are a very good team, and they have been playing about as well as anyone in baseball lately. But, we have just clinched our 12th straight division title, and I wish that everyone would once and for all give Bobby Cox, John Schuerholz and everyone else involved with this organization the credit they have earned. Yes, it is most definitely true that we have only won one World Series, and I personally think we should have at least one more. The other times, we might have just been beaten by better clubs, as most went on to win the Series. But, you know what, winning 12 straight is quite an accomplishment, and our town, our community and our fans should be happy for us and themselves. This is something to be proud about. Again, everyone wishes that we had another Title or three. No one wishes it more than myself, believe me. That November to March each year that we lost a World Series or playoff series was tortuous. But, it made every player on our team work that much harder during the off season to make sure we got another chance at it the next year. And, without fail, for 12 straight years now, we have. This will be our 12th and I want very badly for this to be our 2nd Title during that stretch. I'll do everything I can to make that happen.

We are all hoping that Smoltzie can get back. He is such a crucial piece of the puzzle for us. His record simply speaks for itself. We have confidence in all of the guys in the bullpen to get the game to him. We just need him to close those things out for us. That will be a big boost for the team down the stretch the last 10 days. The other guys are all playing well, too. Sheff and Javy have really had MVP type seasons. I simply can't say enough about what they have done offensively. Same thing goes for Gilly and Fukie setting the stage, as well as Fick, Vinny, and Druw day in and day out. Obviously, the bench has been unbelievable in clutch situations and filling in when called upon. It has really been a great team effort.

I finally came alive at the end of the year. I guess, looking at my career stats, you can see that I heat up in August and September. I honestly think I hit .350 during those months every year. I get letters and emails of encouragement telling me that they have watched me long enough to know that the .300 average, 100 RBIs, 100 runs and .400 on-base percentage will be there. Those emails mean a lot. They really do. Because I know that the people that write those have been watching my career for some time. Here is one for you - in '99 when I won the MVP, I didn't even make the All-Star game at 3B. At the time, there wasn't Lowell and Rolen lighting it up like they are now either. I won the MVP in September. I ended up with the best numbers of my career and I didn't even make the All-Star game. How brutal is that? I guess I'm just a "down the stretch" player. I get excited down the stretch and I really enjoy that time. Don't know how else to explain it. My dad told

me one time that if .300 hitters work hard, they are going to hit .300. I sure hope he is right. He also told me that I was going to be playing 200 games a year and that although each game counts the same, that there will be times when it is tough to just put on your shoes, much less go 3-4 in a game. I hope that everyone can see that I am trying to be a professional by working through the season the only way I know how - with the playoffs in mind.

Hopefully, the next time I write, we will be World Champions once again. Everyone try to make it out to the games and I'll see you this off season. Chipper Jones