

## **Braves help break ground for complex Baseball academy to open in Carver community next year**

By Jon Cooper / Special to MLB.com

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ATLANTA -- Recreational opportunities for inner-city kids often get overlooked, but the Atlanta Braves saw an opportunity to do something right in their own back yard, and immediately went to work. Through the Atlanta Braves Foundation, the team donated \$500,000 toward the building of an eight-acre sports complex and baseball academy in the redeveloped Carver community in southwest Atlanta. The complex, which also received funding from the Baseball Tomorrow Fund and several other private corporations, is scheduled to open next year.

Tuesday afternoon, Atlanta Braves chairman and president Terry McGuirk and current Braves players Chipper Jones, Mike Hampton and Brian Jordan took part in the groundbreaking for the complex.

The ceremony for the groundbreaking included frequent references to the classic baseball film, "Field of Dreams."

"'Build it and they will come' is alive and well on Pryor Road," said Fred L. Bradley, the president and CEO of Metro Atlanta YMCA. "Just a Chipper or a Brian Jordan home run away."

Jones, Jordan, Hampton and John Smoltz, who was unable to attend the event because of personal reasons, also donated \$75,000 each. They will each have a baseball field named for them at the complex, but that was hardly their motivation.

"This isn't hype. This is the real thing," said McGuirk. "These are players with a lot of character and integrity who are putting their money up to do the right thing."

Jones, Hampton and Jordan said they were honored to have their names associated with the fields, though they emphasized that this project is not about them, but about the kids who will play on the fields that bear their names.

"Giving back to the inner-city community, to me, is something that's needed," said Jordan. "To give these kids an opportunity to be positive and have the opportunity to better themselves as athletes, and have the opportunity to earn scholarships is the key. That's the way I grew up. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to play on ball fields and earn a scholarship and educate myself. That's why we need to give back. We're role models."

"It means kids have an opportunity to succeed," added Hampton. "It means giving them a good step forward in helping them achieve their dreams and achieve their goals. When I was growing up, I never had to think about not having a field to play on, not having the equipment. Today, that's not the case with a lot of inner-city kids."

"Without that outlet, I wonder what would have happened to me. I'm a perfect example of having baseball to fall back on to stay out of trouble, to give me a reason to study, a reason to work hard."

The complex will include the four fields, two pavilions, batting cages and a children's playground, and serve as the locale for after-school and summer programs, including baseball, softball and t-ball.

In addition, programs offering sports activities and non-athletic initiatives that teach teamwork, positive self-esteem and character development also will be available.

The sports complex is the latest step in the revitalization of the Villages at Carver, which saw the groundbreaking of a 46,000-square-foot YMCA in September 2004. The tie to baseball for the next step in the redevelopment of the Villages at Carver was a natural.

"It's right in the shadow of Turner Field, so we'll get to come over and look at it," said McGuirk. "Guys like Brian Jordan, John Smoltz, Chipper and Mike Hampton can come over and be part of the whole operation because fields will be named after them. It really feels part of the family, but it's going to be national in scope and national in consequences."

Jones believes that the complex can also have the unintended bonus of revitalizing Major League Baseball in the inner city.

"We're giving back to our community, we're helping inner-city youth get interested in baseball again," he said. "So much of the focus has turned away from baseball the last couple of years. This is our way of donating time and money to help get some excitement back to the younger generation about the game of baseball.

"All of the players' foundations are focused on the younger generation," he added. "We want to come out and promote the game of baseball because it is such a great game. It's springtime, it's baseball season. Kids are supposed to be out playing baseball. If they're not, they're probably out getting in trouble. We want to give them something organized and something positive to do."

"This is for real," agreed Jordan. "To me, this is what it's about, giving back to our young kids and our future."

And while the 2005 season is barely a week old, the players couldn't help but cast their thoughts to next spring and the next step in this process.

"I know the guys are looking forward to next year when the fields open," said Jones. "Hopefully, we'll have a bunch of kids out there to play with."

Jon Cooper is a contributor to MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs