

Notes: Chipper in the flow

Braves third baseman coming back strong after down year

By Mark Bowman / MLB.com

PHILADELPHIA -- It might still be too early to get overly excited about how Chipper Jones has started this season. But he certainly looks to have regained his patented swing, which was absent last year. Heading into Sunday night's series finale against the Phillies, Jones was batting .381 (16-for-42) with three home runs and eight RBIs. The only two games in which he had gone hitless were contests started by Josh Beckett and Pedro Martinez.

"I'm not smoking balls consistently like I'd like to," Jones said. "But they're finding holes. The game of baseball owes me a little bit after all of the injuries last year. So maybe the baseball gods are on my side right now."

During the second week of the 2004 season, Jones suffered a right hamstring injury that plagued him the rest of the year. Attempting to compensate for the discomfort, he lost his timing and wasn't letting his hands guide the bat. He was using his arms, making his swing longer.

By the end of the year, he had a career-worst average of .248. That's not easy to take, especially for a guy who had compiled a .309 career batting average heading into last year. But this week, it's been apparent that he has his old swing back.

Twice during the first two games of the Phillies series while batting left-handed, he's slapped pitches just inside the third-base line into left field. Although Philadelphia's pitch location and defensive alignment might have contributed to his success in the two instances, it shows something that Jones was able to redirect the outside pitches.

"That shows that I'm using my hands," said Jones, who has turned both soft hits into doubles, which also proves that his legs are feeling good again.

Entering this season, Jones' .304 career batting average was the second-best all-time among switch hitters. That puts him behind only Frankie Frisch (.316), while placing him ahead of Pete Rose and Jones' childhood idol Mickey Mantle.

So far, Jones has had just five at-bats from the right side of the plate this season. But he feels good because he's hit the ball sharply in both of his at-bats against Billy Wagner this weekend. He lined out to center on Friday night and singled on Saturday against Wagner, the Phillies' hard-throwing southpaw closer.

"You've got to get more consistent at-bats from both sides," Jones said.

"But I feel really comfortable from both sides right now."