

## **Notes: Chipper may move to first**

**Position change might allow slugger to return sooner**

By Mark Bowman/MLB.com

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ATLANTA - - Chipper Jones' return to the Braves lineup could come sooner than expected if he proves to manager Bobby Cox that he's capable of playing first base.

This option, which Cox is considering, would lessen the wear on Jones' troublesome right hamstring, which was reinjured on Tuesday night, and at the same time fill a big need in the Braves lineup.

"It's just a thought," Cox said while Jones took some throws at first base during batting practice at Turner Field on Wednesday afternoon.

Jones received a cortisone shot on Wednesday, and he thinks there is a chance he could pinch-hit against the Phillies on Thursday. As for his return to the field, he's confident that if he continues making the same progress he did from Tuesday to Wednesday, he could be back this weekend.

"For the record, I can honestly say that I can't remember ever playing a pitch of any game at first base," said Jones, who says the decision about whether he goes to first base is solely Cox's.

With starting first baseman Adam LaRoche expected to be out two months with a separated shoulder, and his platoon partner, the 45-year-old Julio Franco, nursing an ailing sore back that has kept him out of the past eight games, moving Jones to first base has become a top option.

"Right now, I don't know if this is going to happen," said Jones, who spent the first seven years of his big league career as an All-Star third baseman. "But when you're playing the outfield with a hamstring injury, it's harder to get over it."

Jones originally injured his hamstring on April 11, and then aggravated it while attempting to catch a fly ball in left-center field exactly one week later. The second injury forced him to miss 16 games, as he went on the disabled list for the second time this year.

During Tuesday's game, Jones first felt his hamstring tighten while running down a first-inning fly ball in left-center field. He left the contest when he felt even more pain while accelerating out of the batter's box in the fourth inning.

"I need to get healthy and be in the lineup every day," Jones said. "This is one way that I could do that."

As he walked without much of a limp on Wednesday, Jones was thankful that he was able to take the weight off his leg as soon as he felt his hamstring tighten. Had he been in the outfield, where he wouldn't have had the opportunity to stop running, he's afraid it might have popped again.

Jones' most recent setback isn't as troubling to the Braves as the past ones. Braves general manager John Schuerholz said the medical staff has told him this injury is affecting a different part of the veteran outfielder's hamstring.

But one thing that is troubling to Schuerholz is the fact that Jones and many of the team's other top players just can't stay healthy. Rafael Furcal and Jones have already missed more than 20 starts; Marcus Giles and LaRoche are in the midst of lengthy disabled list stints, and Horacio Ramirez has been shelved with a sore left shoulder.

"It's very frustrating," Schuerholz said. "It's the most frustrating season we've had in terms of injuries. But you've got to play with the cards you're dealt, or shuffle the deck. We're doing both."

In the absence of LaRoche, who dislocated his shoulder on Friday, and Franco, who could return sometime this weekend, the Braves have been forced to use Mike Hessman at first base. Entering Wednesday, Hessman was hitting .104 and had struck out in 16 of his previous 32 at-bats.

Furthermore, Hessman has committed six errors in just nine starts (seven at first base) this year.

"When a team is dealing with injury on top of injury, you have to explore all of your options," Schuerholz said. "Right now, we're doing that."