

## Running Some Numbers

By Gary Caruso Editor & Publisher

Baseball is never-ending compilation of statistics and pursuit of records. These numbers, perhaps more than anything else, are what make it so compelling – game after game, season after season.

Nevertheless, there can be a tendency to overlook the true significance of stats and records as they are amassed under our very noses. We know they're in our presence, but we don't give them true appreciation as long as they remain a work in progress.

That tendency is apparent in several corners of the Braves' dugout. Make no mistake, true greatness that will be etched prominently in record books for years to come is taking place as we watch. Don't fail to recognize it. Don't fail to tell your children, grandchildren and friends about it, nor pass up an opportunity to take them to Turner field to witness history in the making. They'll forever be thankful.

Start with Bobby Cox. On April 15, he won his 2,008<sup>th</sup> career game, tying Hall of Famer Leo Durocher for eighth on the all-time list. Before the All-Star break, he will pass Walter Alston – another Hall of Famer – for seventh place.

Major league baseball has been played since 1876. To think that soon only six men in history will own more W's than Cox is staggering.

And there's much more.

Julio Franco, of course, is a chapter of baseball lore the likes of which we've never seen before and may never see again. Not only is he pushing 47, but he's swinging the bat like he's 27. Every week, it seems as if he passes another Hall of Famer on the all-time hit list. His next two targets (at this writing) are Harry Hooper and "Ducky" Joe Medwick, stars from bygone eras but Cooperstown residents, nonetheless, who rank 85<sup>th</sup> and 86<sup>th</sup> respectively, on the hit parade.

John Smoltz, as we know, is writing his own history book by going from starter to closer and back to starter, a career track that could well send him to upstate New York some summer day.

Then there's the guy who is sneaking into hallowed territory and already is destined to go down as one of the greatest switch-hitters of all-time. Entering this season, Chipper Jones ranks second to Hall of Famer Frankie Frisch (.316) for the best lifetime average (.304) among switch-hitters. He is the only switch-hitter ever to hit more than 300 home runs (310 entering the season) and maintain a .300 average. And no switch-hitter other than Chipper has compiled more than two seasons with a .300 average, 30 homers, 100 runs and 100 RBIs. That includes Mickey Mantle. Chipper has done it five times – and counting.

“Chipper, I guarantee, after last year – embarrassed is not the right word – but he was determined as anyone to come out this year with both barrels blazing and show last year was not a true reflection of him as a baseball player,” said John Schuerholz. “He’s worked as hard as anyone, and he has been sensational so far. He has a lot of All-Star caliber baseball left in him.”

It’s all pretty heady stuff, and it’s playing regularly at Turner Field for the next five-plus months.

SPEAKING OF THE Home of the Braves, if you haven’t seen a game there yet this season – and if you haven’t witnessed a Braves home run there this season – you need to know what you’re missing. Management definitely has turned up the entertainment and excitement level, especially with the gigantic HD board in center field and with the narrow “ribbon” board that wraps all the way around the facing of the upper deck. The two displays are programmed to work in synch on certain occasions – most noticeably a home run by the Good Guys. The effect of the colorful, flashing lights is dazzling.

ANOTHER OBSERVATION on the new season:

Adam LaRoche picked up where he left off last year, which is great news for everyone wearing tomahawks except Franco, whose playing time eventually could be impacted.

“LaRoche has so much potential,” said Schuerholz. “He has such a silky smooth swing and real easy defensive maneuvers at first base. We’re real happy with the way he’s growing and producing.”