

Notes: Chipper stays optimistic

By Mark Bowman/MLB.com
06/22/2004

MIAMI – It took Chipper Jones less than a week to prove that he was capable of providing strong defense back at his familiar position, third base, but it will take at least a few months before the veteran can overcome the offensive misery he's encountered in this injury-plagued season.

"Never in my wildest dreams would I have ever thought we'd be this late in the season and I'd be hitting .210," said Jones, who after recording two hits on Tuesday raised his batting average to .217. "Of course, nor would I have thought I would have missed this many games."

Jones' troublesome right hamstring, which he's injured three times this year, forced him out of the starting lineup for 26 of the Braves' first 56 games. His stint on the disabled list – from April 19 to May 7 – was his first since the 1996 season.

The long periods of inactivity have certainly affected Jones, who produced at least 100 RBIs during each of the previous eight seasons and batted at least .300 in each of the past six.

In addition, the switch-hitting former national League MVP still feels some discomfort when he's batting from his natural right side.

"Right-handed, I've pretty much been swinging with one leg because I can't push off," said Jones, who as of Tuesday night was hitting .204 (11-for-54) from the right side.

Jones, who entered the season with a .316 career batting average as a right-handed hitter, is optimistic that by the end of the season, his numbers will look respectable.

"I think I've been hitting the ball better than my average indicates," he said. "I've been just missing balls and hitting balls right at people."

Jones lobbied for the move back to third base in order to lessen the wear on his hamstring, which was more prone to a serious setback while he was playing left field, but he has resigned himself to the fact that this is a nagging injury that will likely bother him throughout the season's first months.

"I'm just happy to be going out there on regular basis, instead of playing a few games and then missing a few," he said. "I've just got to concentrate on staying within what my body will allow me to do so."