

Chipper putting some pop back in batting average

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More than any other player, his is the face of the Braves. So when **Chipper Jones** has his swagger back, that can only be a good thing for them.

After he went 3-for-4 with a triple, home run and four RBIs on Sunday vs. Montreal, Jones sounded like that trademark self-assuredness was back.

"The last thing you want to do is look up at the scoreboard and see you're hitting .210," he said, then smiled and added, "That being said, I'm probably the most dangerous .210 hitter in baseball."

He hasn't been a .210 hitter since going 2-for-4 at Philadelphia on July 11 in the final game before the All-Star break. That raised his average from .208 – 101 points off his career average before this season – to .214.

And after going 6-for-14 with four extra-base hits in the Expos series, he was at .226 entering Monday's game vs. Philadelphia.

That was 95 points below his .321 average during the 2001-03 seasons, but he wasn't worried about the numbers.

"To be honest with you, the last couple of weeks I'm hitting the ball really well," Jones said. "I wasn't getting a lot of hits, but I was still hitting the ball hard."

After the last game before the break, closer **John Smoltz** predicted Jones would be the team MVP in the second half.

"He tends to pop off a little around here," Jones joked Sunday, "so somebody's got to stand up for him and make him look good."

Going from .208 to .226 doesn't sound like much – unless you've endured the worst half-season of your career.

"He's been hitting some balls hard since the break," hitting coach **Terry Pendleton** said, "but hitting balls right at people. . . .It helps when guys around you are hitting. Then you don't feel so much pressure on your shoulders."

With **Marcus Giles** back and **J.D. Drew**, **Eli Marrero** and **Charles Thomas** surging, the Braves haven't had to rely on their cleanup hitter to carry so much of the load.

But they know they'll need Jones eventually, and now he's asserting himself.

After batting .208 with 19 RBIs in 45 games through June 19, he was hitting .256 with 20 RBIs in his past 24 games before Monday. His troublesome right hamstring still bothers him, but he legged out his first triple of the season on Sunday.

"He's getting his eye back," Cox said. "And he's playing terrific at third base."

Jones moved from left field back to his old position in mid-June, and even he's been surprised at how smooth a transition it's been after 2 _ seasons in the outfield.

"To do it right-handed is one thing; that's my natural side," he said. "When I start doing it left-handed consistently, I'll be a lot more comfortable. I'm still missing some pitches I should be crushing. When I start crushing them, you'll know I'm back."