

Notes: Chipper back in the saddle Giles returns to familiar No. 2 spot

By Coley M. Harvey / MLB.com

Chipper Jones' improving health has allowed him to move back up to the No. 3 slot.

(Matt Sayles/AP) Braves Headlines

ATLANTA -- For the first time since going on the disabled list on June 6 with a foot injury, Braves third baseman Chipper Jones batted third in Thursday's afternoon game with the Nationals. The switch from fifth -- where Chipper has been hitting since returning from the DL on July 18 -- to third puts Jones into familiar territory.

"I'm happy, I hope it's permanent," Jones said. "It's where I feel most comfortable."

The lineup change is not set in stone just yet, according to Bobby Cox. The Atlanta manager modified the lineup primarily to allow a day off for No. 2 hitter Kelly Johnson.

"He's played every inning of every game since he's been here," Cox said about his rookie left fielder.

Bringing Jones into the three-hole also prompted the Braves to bat Marcus Giles in Johnson's spot. The second baseman, who had been hitting third, said he was pleasantly surprised about returning to second in the batting order.

"I like the two-hole," Giles said. "It's definitely where I'm most comfortable."

"That's where I'd prefer to hit, but you know, two or three, it doesn't matter to me. I always say, anything's better than 10."

As Giles also pointed out, for the last few seasons, he and Chipper have been the regular two-three combo for the Braves. A permanent change would be a return to normalcy for Giles, who, entering Thursday's game, was hitting .140 (6-for-43) since the All-Star break.

"It's going to be back to what I'm used to, and hopefully it can change us all," Giles said.

Progress for Chipper: A stolen base in the eighth inning Wednesday night may be a sign that Jones' injured foot is healed.

Jones said his foot felt great Thursday morning, just hours after a taxing game the previous evening in which he had the stolen base, a late-inning hit, and scored the game-winning run.

On Tuesday, he said he felt 80 or 85 percent healthy. Before Thursday's game, he said he was feeling "better than 85 percent."

Francoeur plays every day: Atlanta native and rookie, Jeff Francoeur, is expected to get more starting time in the next week, according to Cox.

Francoeur, who has been splitting time in right field with fellow rookie Ryan Langerhans, started for Atlanta on Thursday, and will start the entire four-game series with Pittsburgh.

"It's exciting. It's a great opportunity to get out there," Francoeur said.

The right-handed hitter will get the start over the left-handed Langerhans because three of Pittsburgh's four starters this weekend will be lefties; that is, if they don't trade Mark Redman before Sunday's deadline.

Bowling for Chipper?: While turning the front end of an unconventional 2-5-3 double play Thursday, Jones was taken out by a hard slide from the Nationals' Jose Guillen.

The slide caused debate between the teams after Thursday's game. Some in Atlanta's clubhouse thought the slide was an intentional attempt to take out Jones, who is still recovering from a foot injury.

The Nationals contend that the slide was legitimate and unintentional.

"I think that if I [didn't go] in there and slide the way I slid, he could have thrown Vinny [Castilla] out," Guillen said. Jones disagreed.

"I don't play that way," he said. "None of the guys in here play that way. We're not taught to play that way. It's a dirty play.

"I was kind of playing first baseman. I really didn't see it coming. I just knew [the slide] was high and hard."

Jones said that after the play Guillen apologized profusely for the incident, saying he was just doing his job.

"I apologized to him because I saw his arm come up and I thought it was cut by my spike," Guillen said. "And then I tried to be nice to him, he's one of the nicest guys in baseball."

Washington manager Frank Robinson stood up for his player, contending that the slide was clean because Guillen was just trying to break up the double play.

"Players today are just not used to good, hard slides," Robinson said.

"They're used to people just coming in passive, and when they come in and do their job, people get upset."

More drama for Chipper: Just before the sixth inning slide, Jones contributed to more controversy when Robinson came out the dugout to protest reliever Jay Powell's delivery.

With two runners on base, Powell came in for starter Jorge Sosa, and while he was warming up, Jones asked home plate umpire Gerry Davis if Powell's delivery looked like a balk.

"We watched him, he gave me the A-OK sign, and sure enough, first pitch, Frank comes out," Jones said.

Robinson left his seat in the dugout after Powell's first pitch to Vinny Castilla was called a ball.

"I knew he was going to [come out]," Jones said. "That's why I brought it to [Davis'] attention before he came out there."

The problem Robinson and others around the Major Leagues have with Powell's delivery is that after he comes set, Powell quickly taps his front foot once before throwing the ball. It begs the question of whether or not he comes to a full stop.