

He's got the good face — and more



Dave
KINDRED

If the National League's Rookie of the Year is anyone other than **Chipper Jones**, the honorable voters made the mistake of voting for the sensational over the substantial. Hideo Nomo wrote a happy story for us in this summer of baseball's discontent, a Japanese marvel come to rescue us from the melancholy of our own making. But the **Chipper Jones** story is better, for four reasons.

First, Atlanta's switch-hitting rookie was asked to hit third in the lineup. His entire major league experience was three at-bats in 1993. He sat out 1994 after knee surgery. He worked for a veteran team with a world championship as its announced goal; indeed, anything less than such accomplishment would be considered a failure of the Buffalo Bills kind.

Yet Atlanta's manager, Bobby Cox, has a casual explanation for putting a kid 23 years old in his best hitter's spot. "Hit .320, .330 in the minors," he says. "Doubles, triples, power, baserunning. Going to be All-Star. Forever."

A second reason to like the **Jones** story: The kid did the job. He hit .265 with 23 home runs and 86 runs batted in. In the field, a natural shortstop moved to third base, his only problem came on throwing errors late in the season when Atlanta had built a big lead. "Got kinda suspect then," **Jones** said. "because we were more or less going through the motions. But with the playoffs, we'll turn it up a notch."

A third reason: **Jones** played every day. Nomo every fifth day.

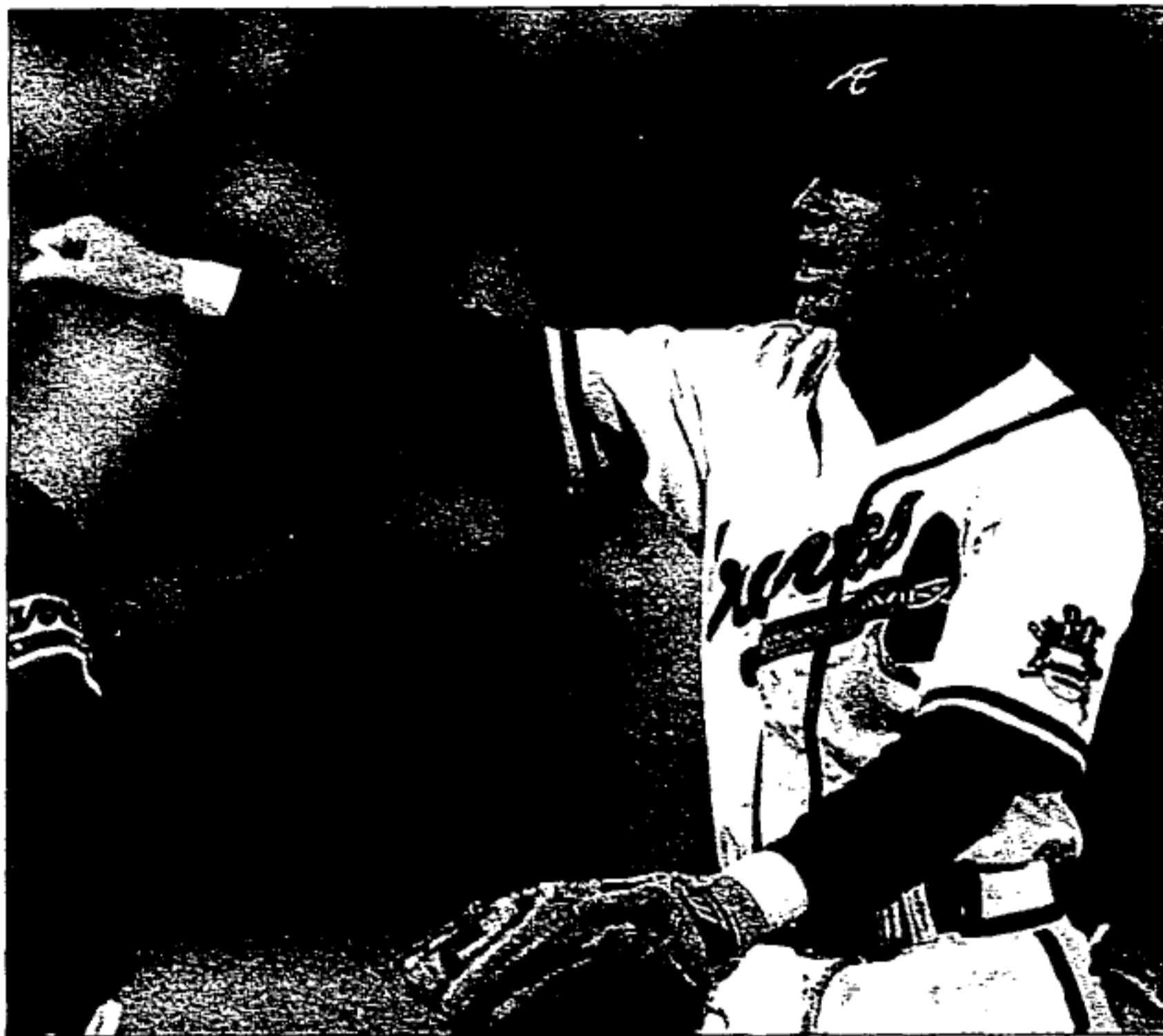
Fourth: The good face. Which takes some explaining ...

Old baseball scouts believe you can look at a kid's face and see if he's got the thing to make his dreams real. "You ever hear of 'the good face'?" the Dodgers' Al Campanis used to say. "Some scout would give me a report on a boy, and I'd say, 'Tell me about his face, or 'Does he have the good face?'"

People see Chipper Jones and say he looks like the young Mickey Mantle. Hold the photographs side by side. Mantle at 23, **Jones** at 23. You can see it. Or you can put **Jones** alongside Eddie Mathews. "Reminds me of Eddie," Bobby Cox said. "The lips, the eyes, the face, the way he moves. Eddie Mathews."

The best part is, we're talking about a look and we're talking about more. We're talking about a kid who can play. He has the good face. There's maturity there, determination. There's the look of a kid who knows what some of us a lot older never know. He knows who he is. He even knows what makes him the player he is: "It's a necessary arrogance."

We're sitting on the splintery pine bench of Atlanta's dugout. **Jones** counts the humble



Blue-Chipper Jones, who hit .389 with two home runs and four runs batted in against the Rockies in the first round of the playoffs, wears the dedication and will to win on his face.

Dale Murphy as a model. So he says "arrogance" so softly as to remove the word's bite. He means a trust in his talent, a self-assurance so strong he could say he's disappointed in not hitting .300.

"But putting me in the three hole," he said. "Bobby wanted power and runs batted in. I did all right there, and .265 isn't that bad. But I still think I'm a .300 hitter in this league."

Truth is, in every league he has been extraordinary because he comes with a baseball gift and baseball savvy. By instinct and by teaching he already is a craftsman, recognized as a superstar in the making by his teammates.

Center fielder Marquis Grissom: "In two, three years, **Chipper** will be hitting 30, 35 home runs." Right fielder David Justice: "What's impressed me most is that **Chipper** hasn't fallen under to all the hype and expectations from everybody." Relief pitcher Mark Wohlers: "Chipper's a special player. Before I leave here, I'll get his autograph and Greg Maddux's."

Four times this season, **Jones** had four-hit games. Three times, he won games with ninth-inning home runs — and this happy summer came after the '94 season, the saddest summer of his life.

"It was my first summer ever without playing baseball," he said. "Just sitting there at home watching games on television, not being able to do anything, was very depressing."

In March of '94, his knee came apart. Surgery put it back together, costing him a year. It might have cost him more because too often the depression felt like a load he couldn't carry. Then he learned he didn't have to carry it alone.

He can smile now: "My wife, Karin, inspired me to get my butt into the weight room and work out." To quote his father, Larry **Jones**: "Karin cried with **Chipper** when

it was time to cry, and she kicked him in the rear when needed."

Fitting, then, that Karin **Jones** would come in for her own touch of fame this year. Carrying a drink up an aisle at the ballpark, she spilled it. The accident was taped by ESPN, which used her fumble on SportsCenter the same night her husband hit a dramatic home run.

"Yeah, we go home that night," **Chipper Jones** said, "and we see Karin on television. She's all over the news. But that's good. It's good that wives get some of the headlines." The next night, someone had a big sign: "If I Was Married to **Chipper Jones**, I'd Spill My Drink, Too."

Early in the season, the rookie's parents came to the ballpark. **Jones** says his father taught him to play; his mother taught him to believe.

Father and son used to go between their house and the hay barn. Throwing a tennis ball, they took turns trying to strike each other out. Dad won. And Dad won. And then Dad lost some games. Soon, Dad lost 'em all. The boy was 13 when Dad told Mom, "I can't beat him anymore."

About then, the boy became a switch-hitter. The man and the boy would watch a Saturday afternoon game on television. They'd go out by the hay barn and the boy would be every hitter in both lineups. Righthanders, he hit righthanded. Lefthanders, he'd turn around. Dad couldn't throw a ball past the boy from either side. Dad told Mom, "Lynn, this is scary."

Dad and Mom came to the ballpark on a night when their boy hit the first big league home run they ever saw him hit. It won a game in the ninth inning. Dad and Mom came out of their seats, made happy noises, hugged the famous Karin, and mostly they cried.

Dave Kindred is a contributing writer for THE SPORTING NEWS.

The Sporting News

President & CEO	Nicholas H. Niles
Editor	John D. Rawlings
Executive Editor	Steve Meyermoff
Director of Graphics	Fred Barnes
Managing Editor	Dennis Dillon
Assistant Managing Editor	Bob Hille
Senior Editors	Ken Amos Bill Marx Carl Montz Mark Newman Ted Rodgers Leslie Gibson McCarthy
Associate Editors	Mark Shamabukuro Larry Wigge
Chief Photographer	Albert Dickson
Senior Writers	Paul Attner Michael Krisley Steve Marantz Bill Wilson
Art Director	David Falkner
Contributing Writers	Terry Frei Michael P. Gelfner Dave Kindred Lesley Hunt Steve Gietscher
Editorial Coordinator	
Archivist	
VP, Production	Kathy Kinkeade
Dir., Information Systems	Gary Brinker
Progress Director	Bob Parayon
Network Manager	Patrick Koleboi
Database Analyst	Terry Shea
Production Manager	Manlyn Kasal
Distribution Manager	Steve Guthne
Graphics Network Manager	Mike Bruner
Macintosh Production Artist	Michael Behrens
Composing Room Supervisor	Vern Kasal
Ad Production Coordinator	Dee Dee Douglas

Books/Yearbooks

Managing Editor	Mike Nahrstedt
Assistant Managing Editor	Mike Huguenn
Senior Editor	Joe Hoppel
Associate Editors	Tom Dienhart Dave Sloan Craig Carter
Statistical Editor	George Puro
Assistant Editors	Kyle Veltrop Angie Blackwell
Art Director	

PUBLISHER

Francis X. Farrell

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES

National Sales Manager	Skip Gilbert
New York	Tom Rudd, Mark W. Westlake Two Park Ave. New York, NY 10016 212-779-5600 Fax 212-532-5450
Chicago	Paula K. Johnson, Midwest Manager Suite 1000, 625 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago, IL 60611 312-337-1647 Fax 312-337-1649
Detroit	Scott A. McInnis, Automotive Category Manager Suite 1830, 1000 Town Center Southfield, MI 48075 810-350-3555 Fax 810-350-3557
West/Southwest	James Souders, Western Manager Suite 5080 West, 2425 Olympic Blvd. Santa Monica, CA 90404 310-315-4396 Fax 310-315-4377
Southeast	Scott Crompton, Southeast Manager The Longshore Group, 603 Martha St. Montgomery, AL 36104 334-263-6050 Fax 334-263-6933
The Sports Marketplace	Vinnie White & Richard Goldstein 2 Park Avenue 8th Floor New York, NY 10016 1-800-445-2714 (212) 779-5448 / 5463

Marketing and Promotion Director	Kit Gees
Marketing and Promotion Coordinator	Nick Scharlatt
Consumer Marketing Dir.	Vince Dema
Associate Consumer Marketing Director	James McGee
Assistant Controller	Dennis Gnebel

Books Customer Service

1-800-825-8508
M-F (8:00 AM to 11:00 PM Eastern)
Sat (8:30 AM to 4:30 PM Eastern)

THIS PUBLICATION IS AVAILABLE IN MICROFORM.

University Microfilms, International
300 North Zeeb Rd., Dept. P.R., Ann Arbor, MI 48106
The Sporting News is available on-line from the Nexis® and DataTimes® services.

TIME'S MIRROR MAGAZINES

President & CEO	Efrem Zimbalist III
Chairman	Francis P. Pandolfi

THE SPORTING NEWS PUBLISHING COMPANY

President & CEO	Nicholas H. Niles
Senior VP, Publisher	Francis X. Farrell
Senior VP, Editorial Director	John D. Rawlings
VP, General Manager	John Kastberg
VP, Production	Kathy Kinkeade

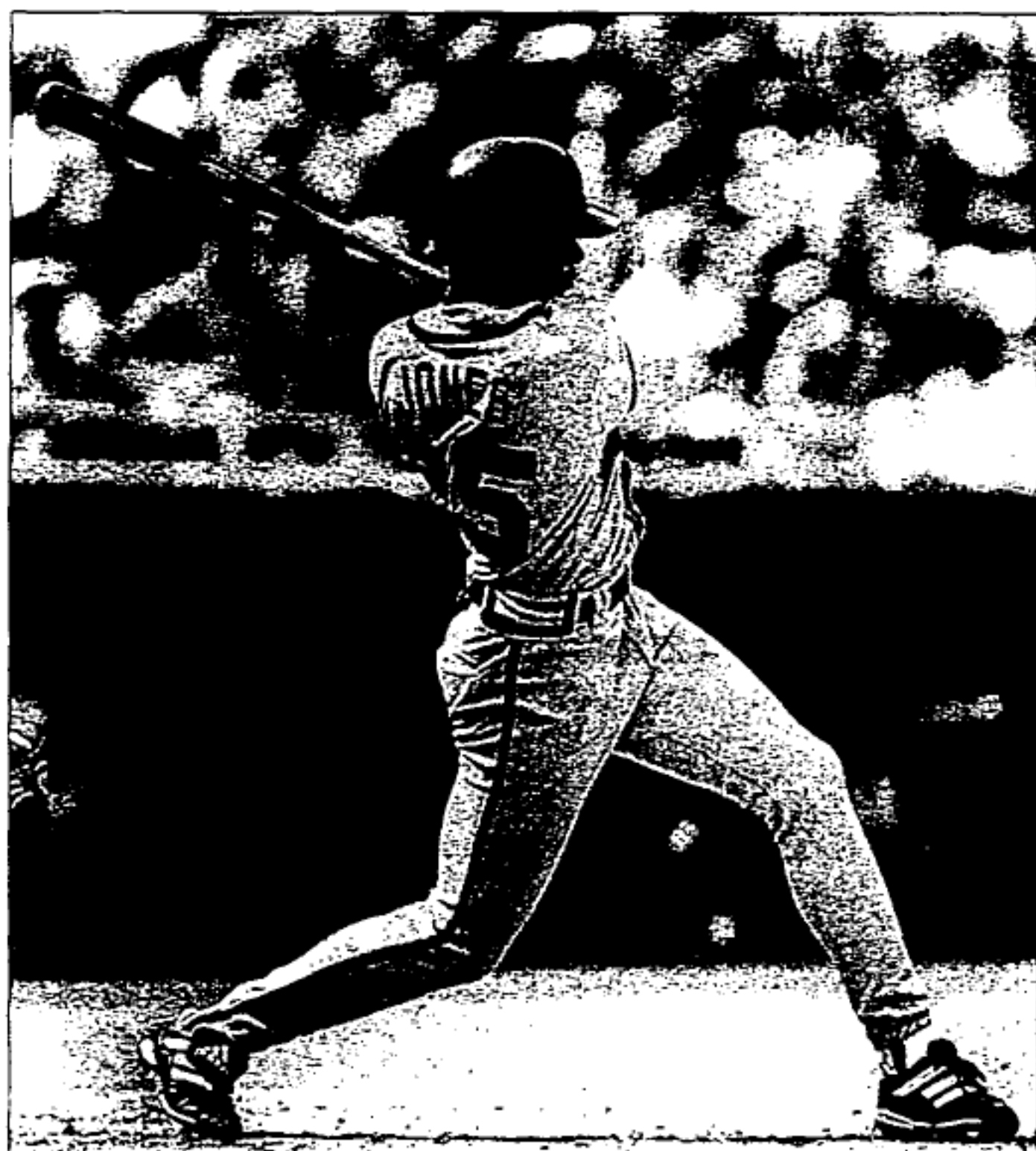
THE FIRST NEWSWEEKLY IN SPORTS

Trade Mark Registered
Founded March 17, 1886, by
Alfred H. Spink and Charles C. Spink
J.G. Taylor Spink, Publisher, 1914-1962
C.C. Johnson Spink, Publisher, 1962-1981

Nothing minor about Jones' talent



Dave KINDRED



Big-league bat speed: After hitting 34 home runs in stops at Classes A, AA and AAA this season, Jones needed only eight at-bats to hit his first Braves home run.

Andruw Jones, the next great one, hears Greg Maddux yapping. Only pitching is more fun for Maddux than watching a baseball game and yapping. So, on his days off, he takes a front-row seat in the Braves' dugout. From there he says to Andruw Jones, "Let's go, Andy. Hit one out, Andy."

Because such chatter fills dugouts everywhere, Jones has heard those words before. But never has he heard them from a man who'll be in the Hall of Fame. Nor has he heard them in the major leagues, for Andruw Jones is 19, a kid whose inevitable arrival as a star may happen very soon.

His itinerary and numbers this season suggest as much. In his third year as a pro, he played 66 games in Class A, hitting .313 with 17 home runs. Then came 38 games in Class AA: .369, 12 homers. And a dozen games in Class AAA: .378, five homers. Adding it up, it comes to .339 with 34 home runs. He stole 30 bases and is a sensational outfielder who not only throws well but to all the right places.

He also has the glowing good looks, happy smile and lean, lithe, powerful body of a young Willie Mays.

From Durham to Greenville to Richmond to Atlanta—all in the four months following his 19th birthday—and suddenly the kid with a bat in his hands hears Greg Maddux telling him to hit one out. And he hears John Smoltz as well.

Smoltz is the righthander working on his 20th victory. As Andruw Jones picks up his bat, it's 1-1 in the fifth inning last Friday and he hears Smoltz shouting, "Hit one out, Andy, it's \$500."

Well, What's a kid to do?

What's a kid to do after a triple off the right-center field wall in the first inning of his first game before the hometown folks? What's a kid to do in the eighth at-bat of his major league career?

If you're Andruw Jones, you do what your elders say. You hit a home run. You hit one out even if the pitcher is a veteran having the best year of his life. Pirates ace Denny Neagle throws a good pitch, a changeup away, a piece of deception that has you off-stride and reaching.

"I try to stay back and keep my shoulder in," Jones says, meaning the kid knows what some old hitters never learn. He knows that being off-stride isn't the same as being defeated. He stays in balance and keeps the bat back. He stays at the plate rather than falling away. With that solid base, with the strength of a kid built to play the game, Andruw Jones takes a good pitcher's good pitch over the left field fence.

"I was just trying to put the ball in play," Jones says, his voice little more than a whisper. Then comes a smile born of the wonder of it all. "And it went out."

His voice suggests a story as astonishing as his talents. Jones

speaks softly and with a musical lilt, the sounds of the Caribbean. English is his third language, after Papiamentu (an English/Spanish/Dutch blend) and Spanish.

Thirty-eight miles long, two miles wide in some places and eight at the most, Curacao is an island of 170,000 people just above the northwest shoulder of Venezuela. Some time ago, Captain Bligh took the Bounty there. Amerigo Vespucci had stopped by, as had merchants, pirates and other rogues. Then, late in the 20th century, came the Braves.

Anywhere there's a baseball, the Braves have a scout. Their man in Curacao is Giovanni Viceisza. Four times he invited Andruw Jones to tryout camps in the island's capital, Willemstad. Only the fourth time did Jones go. He was 15. His father, Henry, went with him.

"We ran 60 yards for the scouts," Jones remembers. "My time was 6.6 seconds. My father ran, too. He did 7.0 seconds," which is flying for a man 46, an outfielder a generation ago. "My father might have been a professional player. But in those years, no scouts came to Curacao."

From the Caribbean and its coastal countries—from the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Panama and Puerto Rico—major league baseball has signed

hundreds of players, four now in the Hall of Fame: Juan Marichal, Luis Aparicio, Rod Carew and Roberto Clemente.

For the \$12 million the Braves invest annually in their farm system, they have earned phenomenal dividends. The system has produced Tom Glavine, Steve Avery, Ryan Klesko, Chipper Jones and Javier Lopez. Now comes the kid from Curacao, Andruw Jones, whose gifts are so obvious that Atlanta's supervisor of scouts, Paul Snyder, tells this story of first seeing Jones:

"He hit a ball to right-center. He came around first at full speed, saw the outfielder come up with the ball and just hit the brakes. He skidded standing up. The only other time in my life I had seen something like that was in 1960 in Philadelphia at Shibe Park." That player was Roberto Clemente.

Amazing, all this. Perhaps the greatest amazement is that Jones has been promoted to the big leagues by the defending world champions because they believe he can help them win again. "This is rarefied air he has moved in," Braves general manager John Schuerholz says. "But Andruw is a remarkable talent. He is un-intimidated by his place on the baseball field."

After his home run on the night when Greg Maddux and John Smoltz asked him to hit one, Andruw Jones came to the dugout's top step and lifted his cap to a standing ovation by people who knew what they'd seen. They'd seen the future.

"I'm really happy," Jones says, "that they clap like that. I have never played in front of so much people."

He laughs when someone asks if he had collected the \$500 from Smoltz. "I think he was just joking."

Not at all, Smoltz says. "He'll see," the millionaire says of the kid making minimum wage. "He'll be happy tomorrow."

Dave Kindred is a contributing writer for THE SPORTING NEWS.

**'This is rarefied air he has moved in.
But Andruw is a remarkable talent.
He is un-intimidated by his place
on the baseball field.'**

—Braves G.M. John Schuerholz

Editor	John D. Rawlings
Executive Editor	Steve Meyerhoff
Director of Graphics	Fred Barnes
Managing Editors	Bob Hille Mike Nahrstedt
Assistant Managing Editors	Mike Huguennin Bill Marx
Contributing Editor	Dennis Dillon
Senior Editors	Ken Amos Joe Hopper Carl Montz
Associate Editors	Tom Dienhart Anna M. Jones Leslie Gibson McCarthy Mark Shimabukuro Dave Sloan Larry Wiggo
Statistical Editor	Craig Carter
Assistant Editors	Mark Bonavita Sean Stewart
Art Directors	Ange Blackwell Bill Wilson
Chief Photographer	Albert Dickson
Photo Editor	Paul Nisey
Staff Photographer	Robert Seale
Graphics Associate	Amy Beadie
Senior Writers	Paul Atner Michael Knisley Steve Marantz David Falkner
Contributing Writers	Michael P. Gelfner Dave Kindred Lesley Hunt
Editorial Coordinator	
Asst. Managing Editor/Online	Mark Newman
Senior Editor/Online	Barry Reeves
Associate Editors/Online	Aimee Crawford Joshua Green Jared Hoffman Kyle Veltrop David Wisor Teri Null
Administrative Asst./Online	
Archivist	Steve Gleitscher
Librarian	James R. Meier
VP, Operations	Kathy Kinkeade
Director, Information Systems	Gary Brinker
Progress Director	Bob Parajon
Network Manager	Patrick Kowal
Tech. Manager/Online Systems	Terry Shea
Production Manager	Marilyn Kasai
Distribution Manager	Steve Guthrie
Graphics Network Manager	Mike Bruner
Ad Production Coordinator	Dee Dee Douglas

PUBLISHER	
Francis X. Farrell	
ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES	
National Sales Manager	Skip Gilbert
New York	
Tom Ridd, Mark W. Westlake	
Two Park Ave., New York, NY 10016-2112	
Tel: 212-512-2000	
Fax: 212-512-2000	
Chicago	
Suite 1000, 525 N. Michigan Ave.	
Chicago, IL 60611-3117	
Tel: 312-337-5449	
Fax: 312-337-5449	
Detroit	
Scott A. McNeil, Automotive Category Manager	
Suite 1830, 1200 Town Center	
Southfield, MI 48075-8100	
Tel: 313-350-3555	
Fax: 313-350-3555	
West/Southwest	
James Scuders, Western Manager	
Suite 5080 West, 2425 Olympic Blvd.	
Santa Monica, CA 90404-3179	
Tel: 310-315-4311	
Fax: 310-315-4311	
Southeast	
Scott Stampton, Southeast Manager	
The Longshore Group, 603 Martha St.	
Montgomery, AL 36104-3334	
Tel: 334-263-6050	
Fax: 334-263-6933	
The Sports Marketplace	
Richard Goldstein & Judy Block	
2 Park Avenue, 8th Floor	
New York, NY 10016-1800	
Tel: 212-779-5448	
Fax: 212-779-5448	
Marketing, Promotion Director	Kit Gers
Marketing, Promotion Coordinator	Jim Prendergast
Consumer Marketing Director	Chane Potter
Consumer Marketing Manager	Dor Lebling
Associate Consumer Marketing Manager	Steve Cardello
Consumer Marketing Business Manager	Mark Walter
Associate Business Manager	Andy Goldstein
Books Customer Service	
1-800-825-8508	
M-F 8:00 AM to 11:00 PM Eastern	
Sat. 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM Eastern	
THIS PUBLICATION IS AVAILABLE IN MICROFORM.	
University Microfilms International	
300 North Zeeb Rd., Dept. PR, Ann Arbor, MI 48106	
The Sports News is available on-line from the Nexis® and DataTimes® services.	
TIMES NEWSMAGAZINES	
President & CEO: Efram Zimbalist III	
THE SPORTING NEWS PUBLISHING COMPANY	
Senior VP, Publisher	Francis X. Farrell
Senior VP, Editorial Director	John D. Rawlings
VP, General Manager	John Kestberg
VP, Operations	Kathy Kinkeade
THE FIRST NEWSWEEKLY IN SPORTS	
Trade Mark Registered	
Founded March 17, 1886 by	
Adolf H. Spink and Charles C. Spink	
J.G. Taylor Spink, Publisher 1914-1962	
C.C. Johnson Spink, Publisher 1962-1981	

BEWARE OF N.L. PLAYOFFS POISON

Having found the right antidote against the Diamondbacks, the Mets need to stay out of harm's way against **Chipper Jones** and the Braves
By Michael Krisley

The best minds in the Mets' brain trust pooled their intellectual resources last week to discover a way to deal with Arizona's leadoff hitter, the speedy Tony Womack. They scoured the scouting reports. They dissected videotape of earlier games against the Diamondbacks. They phoned around the league for advice.

And then, when it came time to call together the pitchers and catchers before Game 1 of New York's National League divisional playoff series against Arizona, they presented all their accumulated wisdom. So what were the players told to do about Womack?

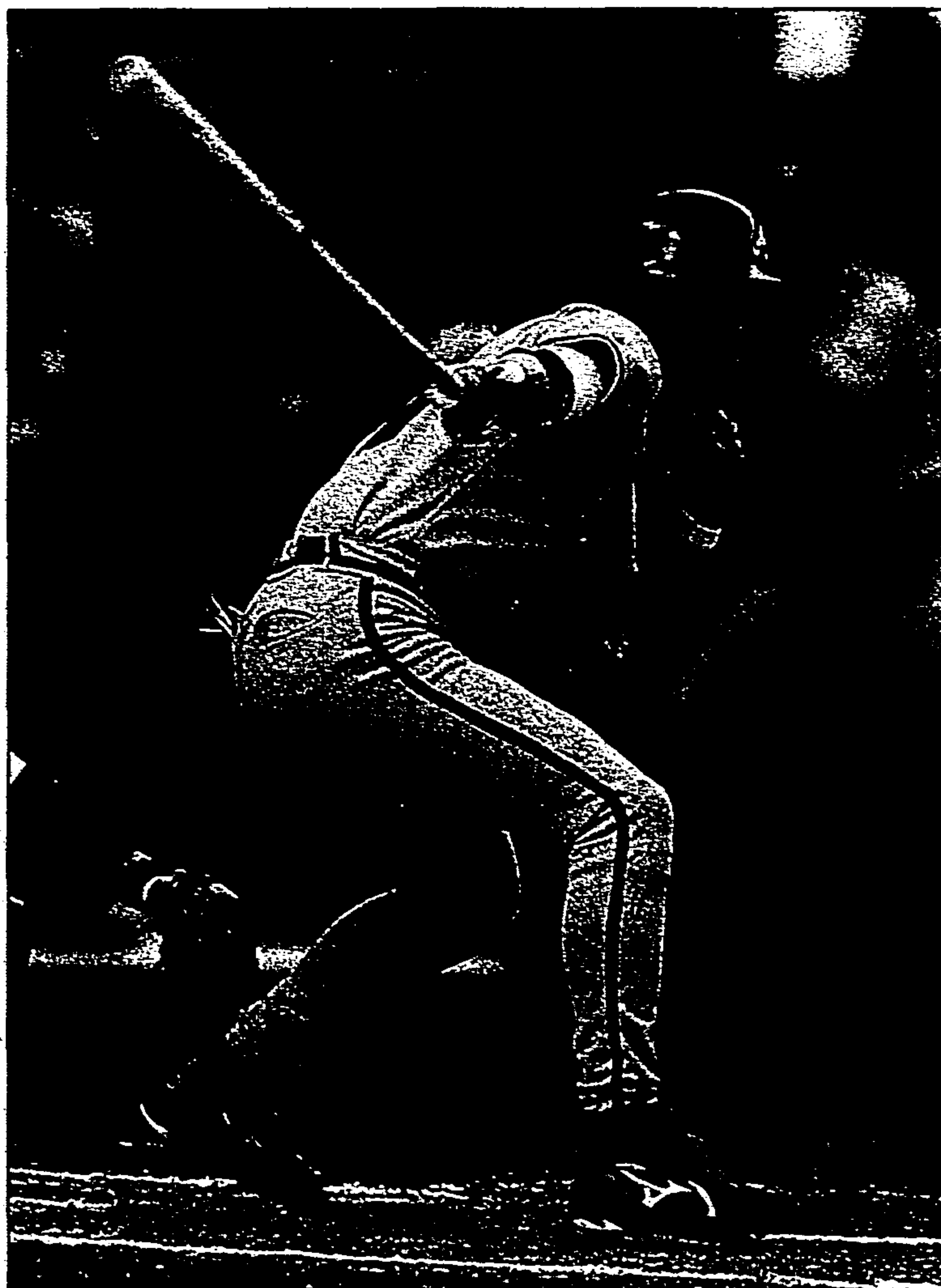
"In the pitchers' meeting," says Orel Hershiser, "the instruction was, 'Keep him off the bases.' That's it. That's all they said."

The real answer to the riddle of Womack, who led the league in stolen bases, was left to the pitchers to ferret out for themselves.

"The thing is, you're not going to tell guys who throw sliders that they have to throw curveballs to him," says Hershiser, defending the simplicity of the solution. "You're not going to tell guys who don't throw changeups that now suddenly they have to throw changeups. You're not going to tell a guy who throws 85 to try to throw 90. You just do what you do best, and try to get him out."

In the end, of course, it isn't quite as elemental as that. If it were that simple, Womack wouldn't have hit .364 in eight regular-season games against New York this year. If it were that simple, the Mets wouldn't have targeted Womack as the most important player they needed to neutralize to advance to this week's League Championship Series.

And oh, how they neutralized him. In fact, they



THE BEST-LAID PLANS ... : The Astros put **Jones** (above, left) in a neutral zone by pitching around him, but the strategy left them vulnerable to other Braves sluggers, particularly Brian Jordan, who found a hitting zone and batted .471 in the series.

reversed the process by which Womack had been the catalyst for the highest-scoring offense in the National League. In four games against the Mets last week, Womack was not a factor at the plate. If anything, he was a negative factor for Arizona. He hit .111. He had two hits in 18 at-bats. He struck out six times. He had no stolen bases. Most important, he didn't draw a single walk.

That—the walks—is the one vulnerability in Womack's game exposed by the brain trust's research. Womack doesn't walk as often as he should—only 52 times in 144 games this season, which is a low number for a leadoff hitter. It was clear to the Mets that if they challenged him, they could at least keep him from reaching base the easy way.

"In our scouting meeting, everyone said he's a pesky little hitter and he likes to work the count," says Mets catcher Mike Piazza, who missed the last two games of the Diamondbacks series with a sprained thumb. "I think everybody collectively put their heads together and said, 'We've got to go

after him. We can't afford to walk this guy.' There's something about walking a guy that just drives you crazy. Drives managers crazy. If he's going to get on base, you want him to earn it. So we were aggressive with him; from the first game on."

In his first at-bat of the series, Womack saw three straight balls from Masato Yoshii. But he didn't walk. He fouled a pitch off and then popped out. That's the way the series went. The biggest difference between the two teams was in their leadoff hitters. While Womack struggled, New York's Rickey Henderson hit .400, stole six bases and generally spent his week disrupting the Diamondbacks' defense.

Without Womack on base, Arizona averaged four runs in the four playoff games. Take away their one victory, a 7-1 decision in Game 2, and the D-backs averaged three runs a game. During the regular season, they averaged 5.6 runs a game.

"Their pitchers pretty much showed their best pitches to me," Womack says. "I mean, that's what

ROBERT SEALE / TSN

The best player on the best team

The N.L. MVP is the only race among the four major postseason awards that offers much intrigue, but one player really stands out



Michael
KNISLEY

I think it's safe to say this: Chipper Jones is no Shoeless Joe Jackson. On the subject of awards, Shoeless Joe once said, "What a hell of a league this is. I hit .387, .408 and .395 the last three years and I ain't won nothin' yet."

He never did, either. Shoeless Joe's time in the game ended after the 1920 season, two years before the American League began honoring its Most Valuable Player. Jackson's best seasons, the three to which he refers, were 1910-12. The closest thing to an MVP trophy back then was the Chalmers Award, which was presented from 1911 to '14.

In 1911, the year Shoeless Joe hit .408, Ty Cobb hit .420 and won the Chalmers Award. The next year, when Jackson hit .395, Tris Speaker won the Chalmers with a .383 batting average. Speaker's numbers were better than Jackson's in every offensive category that year except batting average and triples, and Speaker's Red Sox won the World Series.

Chipper Jones hasn't won anything yet. But it might not bother him as much as it apparently niggled Shoeless Joe. This being the season to campaign for one thing or another, Jones might be expected to announce his candidacy for the 1996 National League MVP. His platform: a .313 average, 102 RBIs, the best slugging percentage (.549) on a team of sluggers and an eagerness to do anything and play anywhere that might further his team's ability to repeat as world champion.

Instead, here he is during the season's stretch run, throwing his support to the just-as-legitimate candidacy of the Rockies' Ellis Burks.

"A guy like Ellis Burks is truly the MVP of the league," Jones said in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* recently. "I don't care where he's playing. He would be doing the same thing if he was playing in Atlanta. He might have 30 home runs instead of 35. But he's getting on base over .400."

Surely, Burks is a worthy MVP candidate, with a platform at least as solidly built as the one from which Jones speaks. Burks has a higher batting average (.336), a higher RBI total (112) and a higher slugging percentage (.638). And, like Jones, Burks is doing all his team asks of him and more. To accommodate Larry Walker's return to



Jones keeping up: A case can be made for a handful of deserving players for N.L. MVP, but Jones stands out because he has an eagerness to play anywhere and a willingness to do anything to help further his team's chances of repeating as World Series champions.

Colorado's active roster, Burks has spent time in center field instead of left—although perhaps without the open enthusiasm that follows Jones around from third base to the outfield to shortstop.

With less than a month of the season to be played, the voting for the N.L. MVP is the only race among the game's four major individual awards that invites much intrigue. Kevin Brown deserves a handful of votes for the N.L. Cy Young Award, but John Smoltz locked it up months ago. Andy Pettitte should win the American League Cy Young, although Pat Hentgen's candidacy grows stronger the longer he keeps winning for a non-contender. And a late rush of endorsements from his peers around the league gives the Mariners' Alex Rodriguez a clear edge for the A.L. MVP.

But in the National League, the voting for MVP will split among Jones, Burks, Mike Piazza, Ken Caminiti, Jeff Bagwell, Andres Galarraga, Barry Bonds, Eric Young and Barry Larkin, last year's winner.

Much wringing of hands is seen in Denver these days over what the Rockies perceive as a lack of respect for their considerable offensive numbers. When Larkin won the MVP last year, for instance, he did it with statistics that didn't begin to measure up to the stratospheric production of Dante Bichette, who finished second in the voting. Clearly, there were some intangibles at work in the minds of the voters, not the least of which is the intangible air that works on the limitless loft of the ball in mile-high Coors Field.

If Jones wins it over Burks—as it says

here he should—the same intangibles will have been at work.

I remember the months and years leading up to the National League's expansion into Denver. Some of the opposition came from those who feared baseball's offensive records might be skewed by a season (or a career) of high-altitude hitting. Now the combination of rare air and the game's most hitter-friendly ballpark is lending foundation to that fear. Just last week, a fourth Rockie, Vinny Castilla, reached the 100-RBI level, joining Burks, Galarraga and Bichette. That hasn't happened in the National League in 67 years, since it was done by the Cubs (Hack Wilson, Rogers Hornsby, Kiki Cuyler and Riggs Stephenson) and the Phillies (Don Hurst, Pinky Whitney, Chuck Klein and Lefty O'Doul).

When Burks and Castilla hit their 40th home runs, as they surely will, they'll dock there with Galarraga, who hit his 40th last week. It has been 23 years since any team had three players with 40 or more home runs. (Atlanta's Davey Johnson, Darrell Evans and Hank Aaron did it in 1973). And Bichette has an outside shot at 40 for the Rockies this year, too.

I have some sympathy for the Rockies' plight in general, and for Burks' quandary in particular. I mean, how well do they have to hit before they're taken seriously enough to win a major award? Should we devise a formula whereby we discount, say, 15 percent of Burks' hits, home runs and RBIs because of the altitude before we toss an MVP vote his way?

And unlike Bichette's season of a year ago,

Burks' production this year is almost as impressive away from Coors Field as in it. Through Sunday, he was hitting .300 with 16 home runs and 45 RBIs on the road. What a hell of a league this is, if first Bichette and now Burks can say they ain't won nothin' yet.

But the environment in Denver inflates the Rockies' offense. And yes, that should be taken into account, somehow.

So, too, should Jones' contributions to the Braves—tangible and otherwise—be given considerable heft. At the end of the season, his statistics won't match Burks' numbers. But on the game's best team, he has become his team's best player.

His recent comments about Burks rang a familiar bell, so I went back to my notes from late last season. Here was Jones, a rookie then, throwing his support in the voting for the National League's Rookie of the Year award to the Dodgers' Hideo Nomo.

"He's the front-runner," Jones said at the time. "I mean, the guy has done things that Randy Johnson would be proud of. He's coming over to a different culture, and he's had to adjust to that. Heck, L.A. is a different culture in itself, compared to the rest of the country. He's leading the league in strikeouts, second in ERA behind only Greg Maddux. That in itself warrants him to be the front-runner."

Nomo won. Jones was second. It was a bad decision that shouldn't be repeated this year.

Michael Knisley is a senior writer for THE SPORTING NEWS.



Houston tried a similar strategy against the Braves in the other N.L. playoff series, with less success. The Astros clearly identified Chipper Jones as the key to Atlanta's offense, instructing their pitchers to avoid him whenever possible. And they did. Jones, who is likely to win the N.L.'s Most Valuable Player award, had only three singles and one RBI in four games, hitting just .231.

The Astros neutralized him, at least in comparison to the havoc he caused with his 45 home runs and 110 RBIs in the regular season. In the Astros' case, though, the cost of their focus on Jones was too expensive. By pitching around him (Jones walked five times and finished the series with an on-base percentage of .421), the Astros weren't able to be as careful with the hitters who followed him in the order. No, Jones didn't kill Houston. The real poison was Brian Jordan, who hit .471 and drove in seven runs. And Ryan Klesko batted .333.

There is an interesting dynamic to the Braves' offense right now. And, at least until the NLCS began this week, no one in the National League has been very successful at disturbing it. The Mets faced Atlanta in six games during the last two weeks of the season, and essentially treated Jones as just another player in the batting order. As a consequence, he burned them badly with four

home runs in the first three games. Over all six, he drove in nine runs and hit .350. The Braves won five of the six.

Then came the Astros, who took the opposite tack in the playoffs, partly because of Jones' success against New York in the previous two weeks. They singled him out as a must to avoid. And they were burned just as badly, even if the flames came from fires other than Jones. Atlanta won the best-of-five series in four games, just as the Mets had disposed of Womack and the Diamondbacks.

"When he (Jones) walks to the plate, he's in scoring position," says Houston pitcher Shane Reynolds, who accounted for the Astros' only victory last week. "He's been very hot lately, so we weren't going to give him anything to hit. I mean, that's the situation."

This is all relatively new to Jones, who until this season had enjoyed plenty of slugging company in the batting order from the likes of Andres Galarraga and Javier Lopez. But with those two out of action, Galarraga with cancer and Lopez with a season-ending knee injury, it has been easier for other teams to try to isolate and nullify Jones. The most telling evidence is the number of walks issued to him this summer. Until this year, he'd never walked more than 96 times in a season. In 1999, he drew 126 walks.

Still, the Astros' approach to him necessitated an adjustment on his part, and it didn't come naturally. Twice in the first two games against Houston, Jones swung at pitches out of the strike zone on 3-and-0 counts and made easy outs.

"You get in a playoff atmosphere, when you're so antsy at the plate and aggressive, and it's hard to stay patient," Jones says. "But you know what? I think you'll see all this change next year. Injuries and illnesses have negated about 70 or 80 home runs out of our lineup. You put 'Cat' (Galarraga) and Javy back into our lineup, especially behind me, and I think you'll see other teams' philosophies change."

"I mean, the guys behind me now (Jordan and Klesko) are certainly capable of hitting home runs and making people pay. Don't get me wrong. But maybe they're a little less likely to do it than the guys we have on the D.L. right now. Hey, I'm proud of these guys. They came out and flat said, 'If you keep doing it, we're going to make you pay eventually.' And they did."

The Mets' late-season failure to beat Atlanta by pitching to Jones and the Astros' failure to beat the Braves in the playoffs by pitching around him make New York's poison-picking choices extremely difficult in the NLCS. The Mets' willingness to challenge him again—or Jones' patience at the plate if they don't challenge him—will be critical to the outcome.

"Whatever happens, we have to do a better job of handling him," says Dave Wallace, New York's pitching coach. "We just can't let Chipper do what he did to us before. We've got to do some damage control."

Those meetings between the pitchers and the Mets' coaching brain trust ought to be interesting this week. You wonder what the instructions will be this time. **TSN**

Michael Knisley is a senior writer for THE SPORTING NEWS.



DOWN AND DIRTY: The Mets' Henderson (below) stirred it up throughout the divisional series that ended with New York and its fans celebrating the clinching of a spot in the NLCS.



I saw. Their job was to keep me off base, and they pretty much did that. They threw their best pitches. They hit their spots. Perfect pitches. On the black, you know. You can't change your approach; because if you do, then you're really giving in. You have to tip your hat to them. They did their job. I just didn't do mine."

Baseball in the postseason is a game of poison-picking. A team decides what part of its opponent's attack is most harmful and then directs a lion's share of attention toward a specific antidote for it in the hope that the rest of the weapons they face won't be fatal. In the Mets' case, the one player they wanted to stop was Womack, even more than the sluggers in the heart of the Arizona order, Luis Gonzalez, Matt Williams, Jay Bell and Steve Finley. If Womack wasn't on base to drive in, the damage those other boppers might do could be limited.

The best player on the best team

The N.L. MVP is the only race among the four major postseason awards that offers much intrigue, but one player really stands out



Michael
KNISLEY

I think it's safe to say this: Chipper Jones is no Shoeless Joe Jackson. On the subject of awards, Shoeless Joe once said, "What a hell of a league this is. I hit .387, .408 and .395 the last three years and I ain't won nothin' yet."

He never did, either. Shoeless Joe's time in the game ended after the 1920 season, two years before the American League began honoring its Most Valuable Player. Jackson's best seasons, the three to which he refers, were 1910-12. The closest thing to an MVP trophy back then was the Chalmers Award, which was presented from 1911 to '14.

In 1911, the year Shoeless Joe hit .408, Ty Cobb hit .420 and won the Chalmers Award. The next year, when Jackson hit .395, Tris Speaker won the Chalmers with a .383 batting average. Speaker's numbers were better than Jackson's in every offensive category that year except batting average and triples, and Speaker's Red Sox won the World Series.

Chipper Jones hasn't won anything yet. But it might not bother him as much as it apparently niggled Shoeless Joe. This being the season to campaign for one thing or another, Jones might be expected to announce his candidacy for the 1996 National League MVP. His platform: a .313 average, 102 RBIs, the best slugging percentage (.549) on a team of sluggers and an eagerness to do anything and play anywhere that might further his team's ability to repeat as world champion.

Instead, here he is during the season's stretch run, throwing his support to the just-as-legitimate candidacy of the Rockies' Ellis Burks.

"A guy like Ellis Burks is truly the MVP of the league," Jones said in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* recently. "I don't care where he's playing. He would be doing the same thing if he was playing in Atlanta. He might have 30 home runs instead of 35. But he's getting on base over .400."

Surely, Burks is a worthy MVP candidate, with a platform at least as solidly built as the one from which Jones speaks. Burks has a higher batting average (.336), a higher RBI total (112) and a higher slugging percentage (.638). And, like Jones, Burks is doing all his team asks of him and more. To accommodate Larry Walker's return to



Jones keeping up: A case can be made for a handful of deserving players for N.L. MVP, but Jones stands out because he has an eagerness to play anywhere and a willingness to do anything to help further his team's chances of repeating as World Series champions.

Colorado's active roster, Burks has spent time in center field instead of left—although perhaps without the open enthusiasm that follows Jones around from third base to the outfield to shortstop.

With less than a month of the season to be played, the voting for the N.L. MVP is the only race among the game's four major individual awards that invites much intrigue. Kevin Brown deserves a handful of votes for the N.L. Cy Young Award, but John Smoltz locked it up months ago. Andy Pettitte should win the American League Cy Young, although Pat Hentgen's candidacy grows stronger the longer he keeps winning for a non-contender. And a late rush of endorsements from his peers around the league gives the Mariners' Alex Rodriguez a clear edge for the A.L. MVP.

But in the National League, the voting for MVP will split among Jones, Burks, Mike Piazza, Ken Caminiti, Jeff Bagwell, Andres Galarraga, Barry Bonds, Eric Young and Barry Larkin, last year's winner.

Much wringing of hands is seen in Denver these days over what the Rockies perceive as a lack of respect for their considerable offensive numbers. When Larkin won the MVP last year, for instance, he did it with statistics that didn't begin to measure up to the stratospheric production of Dante Bichette, who finished second in the voting. Clearly, there were some intangibles at work in the minds of the voters, not the least of which is the intangible air that works on the limitless loft of the ball in mile-high Coors Field.

If Jones wins it over Burks—as it says

here he should—the same intangibles will have been at work.

I remember the months and years leading up to the National League's expansion into Denver. Some of the opposition came from those who feared baseball's offensive records might be skewed by a season (or a career) of high-altitude hitting. Now the combination of rare air and the game's most hitter-friendly ballpark is lending foundation to that fear. Just last week, a fourth Rockie, Vinny Castilla, reached the 100-RBI level, joining Burks, Galarraga and Bichette. That hasn't happened in the National League in 67 years, since it was done by the Cubs (Hack Wilson, Rogers Hornsby, Kiki Cuyler and Riggs Stephenson) and the Phillies (Don Hurst, Pinky Whitney, Chuck Klein and Lefty O'Doul).

When Burks and Castilla hit their 40th home runs, as they surely will, they'll dock there with Galarraga, who hit his 40th last week. It has been 23 years since any team had three players with 40 or more home runs. (Atlanta's Davey Johnson, Darrell Evans and Hank Aaron did it in 1973). And Bichette has an outside shot at 40 for the Rockies this year, too.

I have some sympathy for the Rockies' plight in general, and for Burks' quandary in particular. I mean, how well do they have to hit before they're taken seriously enough to win a major award? Should we devise a formula whereby we discount, say, 15 percent of Burks' hits, home runs and RBIs because of the altitude before we toss an MVP vote his way?

And unlike Bichette's season of a year ago,

Burks' production this year is almost as impressive away from Coors Field as in it. Through Sunday, he was hitting .300 with 16 home runs and 45 RBIs on the road. What a hell of a league this is, if first Bichette and now Burks can say they ain't won nothin' yet.

But the environment in Denver inflates the Rockies' offense. And yes, that should be taken into account, somehow.

So, too, should Jones' contributions to the Braves—tangible and otherwise—be given considerable heft. At the end of the season, his statistics won't match Burks' numbers. But on the game's best team, he has become his team's best player.

His recent comments about Burks rang a familiar bell, so I went back to my notes from late last season. Here was Jones, a rookie then, throwing his support in the voting for the National League's Rookie of the Year award to the Dodgers' Hideo Nomo.

"He's the front-runner," Jones said at the time. "I mean, the guy has done things that Randy Johnson would be proud of. He's coming over to a different culture, and he's had to adjust to that. Heck, L.A. is a different culture in itself, compared to the rest of the country. He's leading the league in strikeouts, second in ERA behind only Greg Maddux. That in itself warrants him to be the front-runner."

Nomo won. Jones was second. It was a bad decision that shouldn't be repeated this year.

Michael Knisley is a senior writer for THE SPORTING NEWS.