

# SUNDAY SHOWCASE



ALAN MOTHNER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Atlanta Braves 3rd baseman Chipper Jones, right, celebrates with Andruw Jones after hitting a grand slam against the Marlins in 2001. Jones is a native of Pierson in Volusia County.

## The Pride of Pierson

### Chipper Jones constructs Hall-of-Fame-worthy career

BY STEPHEN RUIZ  
Staff Writer

When his family lived in Central Florida, Larry Jones' backyard doubled as a land of make-believe. His son played a starring role.

The only child of Larry and his wife, Lynne, spent countless hours with his father bonding over their shared love — baseball. They watched games together on television and played along. Whether the batter on the screen was right-handed or left-handed, the boy — a natural righty — mimicked what he saw by grabbing a piece of PVC pipe and swinging from that side of the plate.

Those rudimentary lessons served two purposes. The young boy got to practice switch hitting, and just as important, he was encouraged to dream.

"I was a big Mickey Mantle guy growing up," Jones said. "He was my guy, and as Chipper started to get better at it, it started to register that, 'Hey, we may have another one like that!'"

Chipper Jones, 45, was 2 years old when Mantle was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1974. Now the native of the small town of Pierson in north-west Volusia County is poised to become a first-ballot selection.

The Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., will announce its 2018 class at 3 p.m. Wednesday on MLB Network.

"Chipper made adjustments as good as any player I have ever seen," former Stetson baseball coach Pete Dunn said of his godson. "I am so confident [he will be inducted] that my wife and I have already made reservations up there for July, so if he doesn't, I am going to have to cancel some reservations."

An eight-time all-star and the 1999 National League MVP, Jones spent 19 seasons with the Braves. He was the offensive catalyst for much of the franchise's record run

of 14 consecutive titles, finishing with a .303 career average, 468 home runs and 1,623 RBIs. As a rookie in 1995, Jones helped the Braves' franchise win its only World Series championship in Atlanta by conquering the Cleveland Indians in six games.

Jones grew into an outsized figure in the sport, one of the best in his generation. It all began in a Central Florida town of fewer than 2,000 residents known as the Fern Capital of the World.

"We love baseball up here," said James Sowell, a lifelong resident of Pierson and its 80-year-old mayor. "Whenever you see a kid, even in Little League, you can tell that kid's a good athlete. He's going to make a good ballplayer, and that's what Chipper was."

B.B. Abbott grew up with Jones, remains one of his closest friends and is his agent.

"When you look back, obviously you realize how good he was, but to us, he was just another one of the guys," Abbott said.

Jones' parents wanted to keep it that way.

Larry Jones played shortstop, Chipper's position before the Braves selected him No. 1 overall in the 1990 draft and shifted him to third base, and was one of Dunn's teammates at Stetson. Lynne Jones was an accomplished equestrian.

Their son's athletic talent was apparent.

After Chipper smacked three home runs in a game against a team from Altamonte Springs that went on to reach the Little League World Series championship game, Larry turned to his wife on the drive home. "You know something?" he said. "He might be one of the 10 best players in the country in his age group."

Said Lynne: "Aw, you're a Little League dad."

"I don't let her forget it," said Larry, a longtime high-school and college coach. "I've been around

#### CHIPPER JONES' YEAR-BY-YEAR STATISTICS

Year	Team	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	SLG
1993	Braves	8	3	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	.667	1.000
1995	Braves	140	524	87	139	22	3	23	86	8	73	99	.265	.450
1996	Braves	157	598	114	185	32	5	30	110	14	87	88	.309	.530
1997	Braves	157	597	100	176	41	3	21	111	20	76	88	.295	.479
1998	Braves	160	601	123	188	29	5	34	107	16	96	93	.313	.547
1999	Braves	157	567	116	181	41	1	45	110	25	126	94	.319	.633
2000	Braves	156	579	118	180	38	1	36	111	14	95	64	.311	.566
2001	Braves	159	572	113	189	33	5	38	102	9	98	82	.330	.605
2002	Braves	158	548	90	179	35	1	26	100	8	107	89	.327	.536
2003	Braves	153	555	103	169	33	2	27	106	2	94	83	.305	.517
2004	Braves	137	472	69	117	20	1	30	96	2	84	96	.248	.485
2005	Braves	109	358	66	106	30	0	21	72	5	72	56	.296	.556
2006	Braves	110	411	87	133	28	3	26	86	6	61	73	.324	.596
2007	Braves	134	513	108	173	42	4	29	102	5	82	75	.337	.604
2008	Braves	128	439	82	160	24	1	22	75	4	90	61	.364	.574
2009	Braves	143	488	80	129	23	2	18	71	4	101	89	.264	.430
2010	Braves	95	317	47	84	21	0	10	46	5	61	47	.265	.426
2011	Braves	126	455	56	125	33	1	18	70	2	51	80	.275	.470
2012	Braves	112	387	58	111	23	0	14	62	1	57	51	.287	.455
<b>Totals</b>		<b>2499</b>	<b>8984</b>	<b>1619</b>	<b>2726</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>468</b>	<b>1623</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>1512</b>	<b>1409</b>	<b>.303</b>	<b>.529</b>

enough players in my life to know he was a pretty good player."

Lynne became a believer when she drove Chipper to Sanford for a tryout camp that was run by a highly respected scout. After it was over, he told her — in front of Chipper — that her son's potential was unlimited if he worked to develop it.

"That was the point when my eyebrows went up underneath my hair," Lynne said. "Whoa, maybe he's got some talent here."

Jones played one season at Taylor High School in Pierson before transferring to Bolles, a boarding school in Jacksonville.

The adjustment was not easy. "He had some crying pains, living up in the dorm, away from Mom and Dad, only child," said Don Suriano, who coached Jones at Bolles. "We thought we were going to lose him, and he was going to transfer back. Daddy wouldn't have any of that 'transfer back.'"

"He was, 'You're going to stick this out and make it work.' He made it work."

Bolles won one state championship and played for another

with Jones in the lineup.

Suriano did not alter his approach despite the myriad scouts who flocked to practice, often beating him there to see a certain skinny, rangy prospect.

"I'm not so sure that Atlanta didn't have Hank Aaron and Bobby Cox come to a game and sit out in the outfield in their car," Suriano said. "That was the rumor back in the day, but I didn't get a chance to talk to them. I had a program to run."

Jones bypassed a chance to play for the University of Miami — Dunn said Chipper visited there with two other highly regarded prospects, Todd Van Poppel and former Lake Brantley standout Jason Varitek — to sign with the Braves.

Jones didn't even have an agent at the time. He received a package worth a reported \$400,000, a tidy sum then but pocket change by today's major-league standards.

"He said to his dad, 'I don't know if I'm getting enough money or not, but I want to play ball, and if I don't make it now, I'll make it later on when I make it in the big leagues,'" Dunn said.

The money trail tends to follow a player who compiled 10 seasons with at least a .300 batting average, including a league-best .364 in 2008; finished with a higher career slugging percentage than Mike Schmidt; and is grouped with Mantle and Eddie Murray among the top switch hitters of all time.

Not that Jones did not swing and miss occasionally.

"When he was in his younger days, he would be the first to tell you that he let some [things] go to his head in his personal life, which obviously led to him being divorced and things like that," Abbott said. "That was something that truly hit home for him as he got older."

Larry and Lynne Jones live in Cumming, Ga., near Atlanta — about 10 minutes away from Chipper.

"He's made some mistakes that his mom and I are not proud of, and I'm sure he isn't proud of, but when it comes down to the nitty-gritty, he's a good kid," Larry said. "I'm prouder of that than I am of his prowess as a player."

One year, Jones was visiting Stetson before spring training when the Hatters were playing. Dunn, Jones and his father, a Hatters assistant at the time, sat in the dugout when Chipper began calling out the pitches an opponent was throwing.

He said, "Fastball," and sure enough, the pitcher obliged. Jones predicted a curve ball, and there it was. On and on, it went.

Dunn, a former catcher well-versed in the subtle nuances of a pitcher's motion, became more perturbed with each correct call.

He asked Jones how he could tell.

"You don't see that?" Chipper said. "You don't see with his fastball, the web of his glove is about an inch lower below his chin than it is on the breaking ball?"

An inch? Jones was not playing backyard games anymore.

This was high-level stuff. Just like the Hall of Fame.

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KIM D. JOHNSON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sluggish Jim Thome belted at least 30 home runs 12 times during his 22-year career with 6 teams.



LENNY IGNELZI/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Former Padres star closer Trevor Hoffman missed the Hall of Fame last year by 1 percentage point.

#### CLOSER LOOK AT HALL OF FAME BALLOT

The 2018 National Baseball Hall of Fame class will be announced at 3 p.m. Wednesday on MLB Network. What we expect:

##### They'll get in

■ **Chipper Jones:** Volusia County native was offensive force behind much of Braves' record run of 14 consecutive division titles. His 468 home runs are National League record for switch hitter.

■ **Jim Thome:** Only seven major leaguers have hit more than Thome's 612 home runs. Longtime Indians slugger reached at least 30 homers 12 times.

■ **Trevor Hoffman:** Ranks second all-time with 601 saves. Received 74 percent of vote in second year on ballot in 2017. (Seventy-five percent is needed for induction.)

■ **Vladimir Guerrero:** Known mostly for time with Expos and Angels, he appeared on 71.7 percent of ballots last year. Combined

power (449 homers) with keen batting eye (.318 career average, never struck out 100 times in a season).

##### Not quite

■ **Edgar Martinez:** Time's a-ticking as this not-so-ancient Mariner has two years left on ballot. Received 56.8 percent of votes last year.

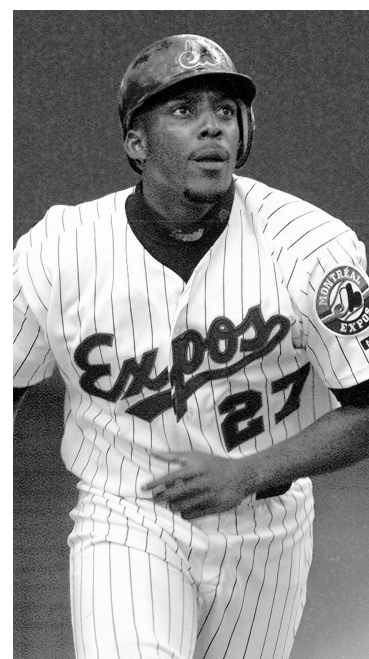
##### Worth watching

■ Where will **Roger Clemens** (54.1 percent last year) and **Barry Bonds** (53.8 percent) wind up in their sixth years of eligibility?

■ **Mike Mussina** has gone from 20.3 percent to 51.8 percent in four years. How much more support will he receive in 2018?

■ Former Dr. Phillips outfielder **Johnny Damon** is on ballot for first time.

Stephen Ruiz



RYAN REMIORZ/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Outfielder Vladimir Guerrero, the NL Rookie of the Year in 1997 with the Expos, is a career .318 hitter.