To Cooperstown for the Chipper Jones Hall of Fame induction

John Davis Cantwell, MD, MACP, FACC

Piedmont Heart Institute, Atlanta, Georgia

KEYWORDS Chipper Jones, Cooperstown, Hall of Fame

The invitation and credentials (*Figure 1*) came as a pleasant surprise, an opportunity for my wife, Marilyn, and me to go on the Atlanta Braves' charter flight to Cooperstown, New York, to celebrate the induction of Chipper Jones into the Baseball Hall of Fame. It was apparently a tribute to my 41 years as team physician for the Braves, including all 19 years of Chipper's amazing career.

He got off to a rough start in spring training his first year (1994), tearing the anterior cruciate ligament of his left knee. After surgical repair and prolonged rehabilitation, he was ready to go, and in his rookie season he helped lead the Braves to a World Series championship over the Cleveland Indians (*Figure 2*).

The knee injury was only the first of a series of injuries Chipper had to overcome in reaching the pinnacle of baseball success (*Figure 3*). He played hard, nursed his wounds, never complained, and was a true professional.

HIS CAREER

Chipper was one of the greatest switch-hitters in baseball history, with a career batting average of above .300 and 468 home runs. He was the National League's most valuable player in 1999 and finished in the top 10 in voting six times. In 2008, he led the National League in hitting with a .364 average (*Figure 4*). He joined an elite group of Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Stan Musial, Mel Ott, and Ted Williams as the only players with a .300 average, a .400 on-base percentage, a .500 slugging percentage, over 450 home runs, 1500 walks, 1600 runs batted in, and 1600 runs scored.

His favorite stadium to hit in was Coors Field in Colorado. His least favorite was Wrigley Field in Chicago, due to the wind, cold, and the tiny, antiquated clubhouse.

His favorite pitcher to face was Shane Reynolds (who tipped his pitches so the astute Chipper knew what was coming). His least favorite was Kevin Brown, "nasty"

Figure 1. The author's credential for Cooperstown. Reprinted with permission from the Atlanta Braves.

Corresponding author: John Davis Cantwell, MD, MACP, FACC, Piedmont Heart Institute, 275 Collier Road NW, Suite 500, Atlanta, GA 30309 (e-mail: john.cantwell@piedmont.org)

Color versions of one or more of the figures in this article can be found online at www.tandfonline.com/ubmc.

Received August 6, 2018; Accepted August 9, 2018.

Figure 2. Pictures the author took of Chipper in his rookie season, celebrating the 1995 World Series championship.

Figure 3. List of Chipper's injuries. Reprinted with permission from the Atlanta Braves.

with “a lot of elbows, kneecaps, and filth coming out of his hand.”¹

Arch-rival New York Mets fans liked to taunt Chipper when playing in Shea Stadium, chanting “Larry” (his given name). Chipper responded by blasting 19 career home runs and even named one of his sons Shea, a living reminder of his great success there.

COOPERSTOWN, THE HALL OF FAME, AND THE ORIGINS OF BASEBALL

Cooperstown is a lovely, small town (population 1852), nestled along the tip of Otsego Lake. It was founded in 1786 by William Cooper, the father of author James Fenimore Cooper. The area was enriched by the Clark family, half-owners of the patent for the Singer Sewing Machine.²

The Baseball Hall of Fame was founded by Stephen Clark in 1939. Cooperstown was selected for the site, based on the myth that former resident and Civil War officer Abner Doubleday had invented the game of baseball in 1839. In truth, aspects of the game probably date back to the British sports of rounders and cricket. Crediting a single person for inventing the game of baseball is akin to noting the individual who first used the wheel.³

Figure 4. Chipper in action. Reprinted with permission from the Atlanta Braves.

Figure 5. Daniel “Doc” Adams, who helped write the baseball rules as we know them.

William Wheaton had devised some baseball rules for the New York Gotham Club in 1837. The New York Knickerbockers, led by Alexander Cartwright Jr., split off from the Gotham Club in the 1840s.

Daniel “Doc” Adams, a graduate of Yale and of Harvard Medical School, was the leader of the Knickerbockers’ rules and regulations committee (*Figure 5*). After getting input from 14 other New York area clubs, he wrote a set of baseball rules in 1857 close to what we follow today and probably incorporating some of the Gotham Club’s rules

Figure 6. The author with Chipper at a private party.

(nine innings, 90 feet between the bases, nine members to a team). He is also credited with adding the position of short-stop, which Chipper played in the minors.⁴ Dr. Adams practiced in New York City and left medicine in 1865, eventually becoming a bank president and a legislator.

The Hall of Fame and associated businesses occupy most of downtown Cooperstown. Each summer, youth baseball players, all aged 12, from around the country, converge on the nearby sports complex. Our grandson, Cameron, was one, and almost broke up a no-hitter (by a seemingly older California pitcher) with a sharp single to the right, only to be thrown out at first by the right fielder, who was playing a shallow position.

CHIPPER'S INDUCTION

Along with Jim Thome, Vladimir Guerrero, and Trevor Hoffman, Chipper was admitted into the hallowed Hall of Fame on July 29, 2018. Jack Morris and Alan Trammell also joined them, via the Modern Era ballot. I got to visit with him the evening before (*Figure 6*) at a private party the Braves held.

In his induction speech (*Figure 7*), Chipper decorated the lining of his sport coat with reproductions of family pictures. An only child, he credited his parents for much of his success. His advice to his sons: “Blaze your own trail in whatever you’re passionate about. Believe in what you do, love whatever you do, and know that I love you unconditionally, and will support you in whatever path you choose.”⁵

LESSONS FOR MEDICAL PERSONNEL

Chipper had several “errors” early in his personal life (as can happen when one is young, rich, and famous) but is happily married now with seven sons (the latest named Cooper, for obvious reasons). His professional life was exemplary, with lessons that physicians could emulate:

- He respected the game and those who had preceded him (as true of any profession).
- He was able to perform, despite nursing various injuries and illnesses. Physicians sometimes have to do likewise, coming to the office to see 25 or so patients in need,

Figure 7. Chipper receiving his Hall of Fame plaque. Reprinted with permission from the Atlanta Braves.

despite not feeling up to par (and not wanting all of those patients to have to reschedule or be inconvenienced).

- Chipper had self-confidence, without any hint of arrogance—traits of a good physician as well.
- He realized that baseball is a team game (like medicine) and worked well with and appreciated his colleagues.
- He always projected a professional image. As Derek Jeter commented, “He just looks like a baseball player. The way he carries himself and the way he runs and the way he swings, everything about him just defines a baseball player in my mind.”¹ A physician should project such an image with dress and deportment.
- He worked as long as he could enjoy it and do the job. It is important, however, not to stay too long (as Willie Mays did, stumbling about in the outfield where once he gracefully roamed) when your skills start to diminish. Chipper realized this after the 2012 season when his average dropped to .287 and his home run total to 14, limited by degenerative knee issues.
- The best advice he’d ever been given: “Come to the ballpark [or office I’d say] and do your job every day.”¹

He certainly did that, for which he is revered by Braves fans (and even by opponents).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author thanks Stacie Waddell and Beth Marshall, who helped with the figures, and Fred Boyer, who prepared the article. *Figures 1, 3, 4, and 7* are courtesy of the Atlanta Braves.

1. Atlanta Braves. *Official 2012 Souvenir Program*. Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Braves; 2012.
2. Weber NF. *The Clarks of Cooperstown*. New York: A. A. Knopf; 2008.
3. Wikipedia. History of baseball. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Origins_of_baseball. Accessed August 13, 2018.
4. Wikipedia. Doc Adams. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doc_Adams. Accessed August 13, 2018.
5. Hummer S. Chipper hits for emotional cycle in Hall of Fame speech. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 29, 2018. <https://www.ajc.com/sports/chipper-hits-for-emotional-cycle-hall-fame-speech/vFWy1MPRZ7CAXACKHOPKTP/>. Accessed August 13, 2018.