



JEFF FRANCOEUR

Our Hometown Home Run Sensation

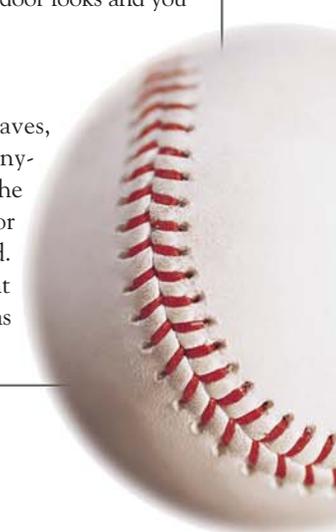
BY KATIE KELLY BELL

SITTING IN THE STANDS AT TURNER FIELD watching Jeff Francoeur round the bases after hitting his second home run of the game brings back memories for me. Memories of that same Francoeur at 12 years old, running in and out of the seventh grade classroom I shared with his mother Karen. Never one to sit still, he was constantly in motion, with his mother often chiding, "Jeffrey, please go somewhere else and goof off; we have work to do here." Thankfully, that excess energy has found its place — in right field for the Atlanta Braves.

As one of the team's hottest players this year, Francoeur is in serious contention to win the National League Rookie of the Year award and is widely adored by Braves' fans everywhere. With a batting average hovering around .325 and a golden right arm that can rifle the ball across the field to make amazing defensive plays, he has plenty of reasons to relax and savor his spectacular popularity. Add his "aw-shucks" self-effacing demeanor, mega-watt smile and handsome boy-next-door looks and you have a legend in the making.

AN EYE ON THE BALL

Long before he joined the Braves, Francoeur's name was synonymous with athletic talent, but he has never taken his talent for granted and he's never coasted. In truth, a tremendous amount of hard work and discipline has fueled his rise to stardom.





He began his baseball career watching the games of his older brother and sister, absorbing the plays and the rules through visual osmosis. Yet, his mother noted, “He was always like that. He never wanted to color or play in the dirt at those games. Jeff just wanted to watch the game, even as a toddler. If I had been more sports-oriented, I might have picked up on his intensity sooner. I didn’t come from an athletic family. This is unbelievable that we have a kid like this in our family,” Karen explained.

Indeed, instead of staring at Saturday morning cartoons on television, Francoeur was busy watching sports. When he finally began playing at the age of 4, he knew many aspects of the game and took it seriously. What his mother remembers most significantly isn’t her son’s talent, but rather his responses to the other kids. “What he couldn’t understand was why the other kids didn’t know the rules. He never got mad or frustrated at the other players,” Karen added. “He’d help them; he always felt like it was his responsibility.”

Naturally, Francoeur’s seamless skills with a baseball garnered significant attention, and at the age of 10, he started playing with a traveling team. He traveled for two summers, spending his supposedly free days on the road playing baseball instead of swimming at the pool with his buddies.

When he was 12 years old, he went to his father David and asked to quit the traveling team. “I just got burned out,” Francoeur recalled, admitting that after only one summer off he realized how much he missed baseball. His parents gladly obliged and continued spending summers on the road. When asked who influenced him the most, Francoeur immediately referred to his father. “From an early age, he knew I was serious about the game, and he helped me rather than

pushed me. He encouraged me to go out in full and let me work things out on my own,” he said.

A few years later, after leading Parkview High School of Lilburn to the state championship in baseball (and football), the scouts were swarming, eager for a commitment. Francoeur decided to sign with the Braves as a first-round draft pick, earning a \$2-million signing bonus along the way.

DOUBLE PLAY

Despite his meteoric rise and national appeal, 21-year-old Francoeur remains unflappable, largely because religion and faith have always played front and center, and they still do.

“Our family values are founded on faith and being grounded as Christians,” Karen explained, as David added, “I hope and pray that he doesn’t forget his sense of where he came from. Giving back to the community, doing for others, being thankful for what you have — that’s what’s most important.”

The even-keeled baseball superstar echoes his father’s sentiments. “I surround myself with people that are going to keep me humble. It keeps me grounded,” Francoeur said. “Also, knowing as good as it’s going now, it can be just as bad, especially in this game. You never want to get too high and you never want to get too low. I’m humbled by the fact that the good Lord blessed me with a chance to play this game. I just try to glorify it and play to the best of my ability.”

Having recently been a starry-eyed Braves fan himself, Francoeur takes special care to sign balls for kids and really talk to them about the game. “You’re a role model to all kids on or off the field. Just being an adult makes me a role model,” he acknowledged.

FRANCOEUR SHRUGS OFF HIS TREMENDOUS TALENT, GIVES THANKS FOR THE CHANCE TO PLAY BALL AND DOESN'T MIND IF HIS TEAMMATES CALL HIM "FRENCHY."

While her son understands his responsibilities as a public figure, Karen said, "The only thing he needs to work on is his patience at the plate."

Impatience is one weakness Francoeur admits he'd like to change. "If you look at my record, I have something like 86 at bats and no walks right now, which is pretty tough to do. All the guys give me a hard time about it," he admitted. In fact, his first base on balls didn't happen until his 34th game. Hard time or not, he continues to slam out the home runs.

"The player I always wanted to be like is Vladimir Guerrero of the Angels because he'll swing at everything. He's a free swinger. I'm very aggressive [too]. I play baseball because I love to hit. You need to play defense because it's something you have to do to be able to hit," Francoeur said.

As a rookie in the minor leagues, his lack of patience landed him on the injured list. While squaring around to bunt, a ball cracked his cheekbone and Francoeur suffered a major facial injury. Describing this low point in his career, Francoeur considers the two screws in his face to be a painful reminder of how quickly things can change. "It was a turning point for me, making me realize I have no control over when things are going to happen (like getting called up), and I should stop trying to force the issue. When I finally started to relax, that's when things got better," he said.

And change they did. On July 7, weeks after several of his Richmond teammates had been promoted to Atlanta, a lonely Francoeur received the call he'd been intently awaiting. Not one to let a case of nerves influence his performance, he hit a homer during his debut at Turner Field and was required to take a curtain call to placate the

Gentle... Wisdom Teeth Removal In a Warm, Friendly Environment



- Before they cause crowding, and before your child is off to college
- Full general anesthesia available for comfortable removal of wisdom teeth
- Modern, fully-equipped out-patient surgery center
- Experienced and highly-trained surgical staff

Christian A. Loetscher, D.D.S., M.S.

BOARD CERTIFIED: AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
ORAL & MAXILLOFACIAL SURGEONS

BOARD CERTIFIED: AMERICAN DENTAL SOCIETY
OF ANESTHESIOLOGY



ATLANTA
ORAL &
MAXILLOFACIAL
SURGERY, P.C.

770-729-1481

www.jawimplant.com

3875 Holcomb Bridge Rd.
Peachtree Corners

Simply Sensational Skin

Vbeam Vascular
Laser for Facial
Redness of
Rosacea

Chemical Peels
for Reduction of
Fine Lines and
Sun Damage

Botox
Injections

Collagen,
Restylane
and Sculptra
Injections

Mole Removals

Anti-aging
Regimens

Laser Hair
Removal



Lisa Prestwood, NP-C

Leslie C. Gray, MD
Certified by the American
Board of Dermatology

5th Anniversary Special Offer

For the past five years, Dermatology Center of Atlanta has served its clients with the highest quality cosmetic procedures offered in the Atlanta area. To celebrate our 5th Anniversary, we will offer our existing clients and new customers a 10 percent discount off all cosmetic procedures during the month of October. Simply present a copy of this ad for your discount.

We appreciate the opportunity to serve you and have enjoyed getting to know each of you during the past five years. We thank you for your loyalty and for your continued support.

DERMATOLOGY
Center of Atlanta

770.497.0699

10700 Medlock Bridge Road • Suite 102 • Duluth, GA 30097

JEFF FRANCOEUR

screaming fans. Since that time, his bat and his popularity have yet to cool.

In his first 53 games as a major leaguer, Francoeur had 12 home runs, 38 runs-batted-in, sported a .325 batting average and had a .618 slugging percentage. While his hitting exploits were extraordinary during his first two months, his defensive contributions were equally amazing. Francoeur threw out 11 opposing runners from right field, three more than centerfielder and perennial Gold Glove winner Andruw Jones had in three times as many games.

DIAMOND NOTES

In his typically modest manner, Francoeur shrugs off his tremendous talent, gives thanks for the chance to play ball and doesn't mind if his teammates call him "Frenchy." He does a commendable job of letting the little things roll off his back. The only thing he seems to take seriously is playing the game and enjoying the moment.

Appreciative of sage advice from veterans, Francoeur said, "Different players have had different effects on me. John Smoltz and [Chris] Reitsma keep me going in my faith. Chipper [Jones] has given me some good advice on hitting and about coming up young the way he did."

It seems to be working, as the Braves are once again contenders for a consecutive division title — their 14th — in no small part due

to the influence of Francoeur and his fellow rookies. "Every year people think we're done, that we won't win. And each year we do it a new way with new guys. I've watched this team for the last 13 years and to be a part of this is something special," he said with pride.

These days he spends his afternoons fielding interview calls from countless media outlets and trying to squeeze in visits to his family and his girlfriend Catie. Off the field, Francoeur relaxes by playing golf when he can. If he is actually sitting down, he's most likely eating and watching sports. Otherwise, he is busy bringing intensity and purpose to every ball game. Afterwards he climbs in his F150 King Ranch, fires up a country music CD, and calls home to check in with his parents and talk about the game.

After many years of hard work, passion and sacrifice, the baseball player and his entire family are relishing his success. Friends are often surprised that Karen and David Francoeur attend every game. Why not? Thinking about the present and the future, David summed it up best, "If I die tonight, it would be fine because of the joy I feel now as a parent looking out on Turner Field, knowing we gave him the chance. We didn't get him there, he did that, but we gave him the opportunities and look what he did with them." ♦

Photos courtesy of The Atlanta Braves National League Baseball Club.

ELEGANT HOME ADDITIONS, LLC

The Extraordinary Alternative to an Ordinary Room Addition



See the *ELEGANT HOME ADDITIONS* Difference! Elegant Home Additions, featuring Four Seasons Sunrooms, is truly the extraordinary alternative to ordinary conventional construction. Don't settle for that same old ordinary room addition or patio room as others have. Add unique, beautiful and exciting year round living space only available through Elegant Home Additions.

Call now and visit our showroom. With 8 fully furnished home additions on display and hundreds of styles and sizes to choose from, here is your opportunity to see the Elegant Home Addition difference.

SAVE THOUSANDS!

Our Special End of Summer Savings Opportunity is the time to experience the Elegant Home Addition difference. Call Now!

This savings event is for a limited time only!



North America's Premier Sunroom Manufacturer
FOUR SEASONS SUNROOMS
Outdoor Living...Indoors!
AN ULTRAFRAME, LLC COMPANY
Independently Owned and Operated

5180 Peachtree Industrial Blvd
Suite 100 · Chamblee · GA 30341
(770) 451-6684
www.ElegantHomeAdditions.com