

Giles serious about staying aggressive despite his role as leadoff man

by Tom Krasovic

The impish antics of brothers Brian and Marcus Giles have added mirth to a San Diego Padres spring training that is soon to end.

Even General Manager Kevin Towers is not exempted from the fun, as he discovered Wednesday upon entering a clubhouse bathroom. A few seconds into the task, Marcus Giles, the burr-headed, 5-foot-8 second baseman Towers signed in December, peeked into the room to ask Towers how he was doing.

Such yuks have no direct bearing on how the Gileses perform - but one game that the Brothers Giles are playing behind the scenes could.

It's the old game of pretend, with a baseball twist.

"I'm going to pretend like I'm hitting second all year," said Marcus.

"I'm going to keep reminding him of that," said Brian.

Padres fans shouldn't be surprised if they witness a few leadoff homers this year with Marcus Giles batting No. 1.

In reality, Marcus will be the leadoff hitter when the Padres open their season against the Giants and ace Barry Zito on Tuesday in San Francisco - and Brian, the older brother, will be the No. 2 hitter.

But the Brothers Giles have resolved to keep Marcus in the same aggressive mode that worked well for him as a No. 2 hitter for the Braves, before he was thrust into Atlanta's leadoff job last year by the departure of Rafael Furcal.

"I'm aggressive," said Marcus, who has clubbed more doubles (148) over the past four years than any other National League second baseman. "That's my style. I can't change myself and make myself a disciplined hitter. At 28, you're not going to change who you are. Ever since Little League, I've been a free-swinger all of my life."

Said Brian: "We've talked about it for all of spring training. He's got to stick with the approach that has made him successful."

Manager Bud Black and teammates have supported Marcus by telling him he simply should play his game, rather than try to emulate natural leadoff men such as the ultra-patient Rickey Henderson. "It's really great to have that kind of support," Marcus said.

Brian said it would be counterproductive to ask his brother to go about the leadoff chores the way his predecessor in the job, Dave Roberts, did in 2004-05.

"Really, Marcus has been thrown into the leadoff spot because we don't have a prototypical leadoff guy," Brian said. "He knows the situations where he needs to take a pitch - but he should approach it as if he is hitting second or seventh."

Brian said the advice he gives his brother is consistent: "Stick to the approach that's made you successful. Don't change because you are the leadoff hitter."

Brian will make it easier for Marcus, the brothers said, by doing what comes naturally to him as well. As patient as Marcus is not, Brian led the league in walks (119) in 2005 and placed fifth last year with 105.

"I can take pitches," Brian said. "So if we don't get the read off (Marcus') pitches, maybe we can get it off mine."

Marcus Giles said he blames only himself for his reduced production in 2006, but his older brother said well-meaning advice from some within the Braves organization may have overloaded his brother's circuits.

"I know when things weren't going good for Marcus, people were saying maybe you should change this or change that," Brian said. "That's difficult for a young player that's never led off. The last thing you want when you're up there is to be thinking about that stuff, instead of seeing the ball and doing what you can do."

A .344 hitter when putting the first pitch into play last year, Marcus batted .169 after the count reached 2-0 and .218 after falling behind 0-1. The younger Giles, who according to his brother was hindered by residual, weakening effects from a fractured finger, averaged a career-high 3.88 pitches per plate appearance - but his

.341 on-base percentage was 20 points below his career average, and his slugging was down more than 60 points.

Speaking an hour after he blasted a 1-0 pitch some 380 feet for a double to right-center - his favorite place to drive the ball - Wednesday against the Royals, Marcus, a right-handed batter, said he needs to be true to the talent. Giles, drafted by Atlanta in the 53rd round, batted .320 in 551 minor league games and hit .316 with 49 doubles for the Braves in 2003, .311 with 22 doubles in 102 games in 2004 and .291 with 45 doubles in 2005.

"A major league hitter - you are born with that gift," Marcus said. "It's just a matter of how hard you work with it. It's either you've got it, or you don't."

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