

Professional Athletes with ADHD?

Q&A with Adam LaRoche

ChopTalk Magazine's Patty Rasmussen chats with Adam LaRoche about the obstacles that the Braves first baseman has overcome throughout his career, including battling Attention Deficit Disorder as a professional athlete. LaRoche, who entered Tuesday leading the Braves in doubles with 31, also discusses his enthusiastic fan clubs, his power spike this season and much more.

ChopTalk: Are you taking anything for ADD (attention deficit disorder)?

Adam LaRoche: Yes, I am.

ChopTalk: What is it?

LaRoche: I'm taking a type of Ritalin. I've been taking it for about two months.

ChopTalk: Do you feel different? Is it helping you?

LaRoche: I feel a lot different. I went and saw a guy a couple of months ago. I wanted to get the facts straight. I asked, "Do I have ADD, or am I using this as my excuse to be a lazy human being?" We went through the tests, and he told me, "Without a doubt, you have ADD. There's no question." It was good to hear, because I could get on something (medication). I tried it for a couple of weeks, and I noticed the difference. But I noticed it the most when I would forget to take it. It's helped. It helps me to focus for three hours when I'm playing and not be spacing out or thinking about a million different things. We're still experimenting with dosages. **ChopTalk:** When were you first diagnosed with ADD?

LaRoche: It was 10 years ago, and I never did anything about it. I finally went to another doctor when I was talking to one of the team doctors and asked him about it. He said, "Would it hurt to get it checked out?" And I figured it wouldn't hurt and asked [trainer] Jeff Porter to find a good doctor to see. Then I got my diagnosis and started the treatment.

ChopTalk: Did you talk to other players [with ADD] about your situation?

LaRoche: I talked to [Houston's] Craig Biggio in Spring Training, and he told me what he took and what it did for him. He suggested I try it, that it couldn't hurt, and I never did. [Dodgers right-hander] Derek Lowe actually came up to [Braves general manager John] Schuerholz during batting practice this season to speak to him about me. Lowe said to Schuerholz that he'd heard I had a form of ADD, and this is what [Lowe] was taking, and to please tell Adam to look into it. Schuerholz came to me and said, "If you want to look into this, Lowe is trying to help." Finally, I thought I should take all these people's advice.

ChopTalk: Did it encourage you to know that other players were in the same situation, taking medication and still being successful?

LaRoche: Yes, it was definitely encouraging. It was also encouraging to know that even guys I didn't know well were concerned about how I was feeling and my well-being. I was glad we got it cleared up.

ChopTalk: Do you think the medication has had any bearing on your improved hitting?

LaRoche: I would have to say it has something to do with it. It's not like a steroid or a drug that helps your vision or fixes your mechanics, but if you can get a little extra focus and concentration, I think it has to help. I also think it was my time to start hitting, to get on a roll. **ChopTalk:** Do your teammates, manager and coaches know that you're on the medication?

LaRoche: Most of the guys know. Some of the guys came up to me early, when I first started taking it, asking if I was taking something. They were saying they could see a difference, and they didn't even know I was [taking the medication]. They said I seemed more awake, alert and had more energy. The first time someone said something I thought, "Sure, whatever," but I've heard it from enough people to think it has to be changing my behavior.

ChopTalk: What's it like to have two of the most enthusiastic fan clubs this season -- LaRoche's Ladies and Adam's Army -- cheering for you?

LaRoche: It's pretty neat to have fans like that. I've known the LaRoche's Ladies for three years.

ChopTalk: Didn't they used to be Marcus Giles fans?

LaRoche: It took a little bit of money and work to get them to my side! I met the "Army" the other day on the field. They told me I wouldn't see them for the last month and a half of the season because they're all leaving for college.

ChopTalk: So what turned the hitting around? You raised your average 38 points from May 14 to July 16 (from .221 to .259).

LaRoche: First of all, it had nowhere to go but up. When you're hitting .200, it's hard to go below that. I haven't changed anything in my swing. I stuck with it, because early in the season, I was hitting balls hard, even though I was only getting one hit a game. I talked to T.P. [Terry Pendleton] and my dad [Dave]. There were a few people who said you might want to change some things, but I kept looking at the balls I was hitting and saw they just weren't going my way. I couldn't change [anything]. It felt too good.

ChopTalk: Where does your confidence come from -- just sticking with your swing?

LaRoche: Yeah, some of it comes from looking back and not finding anything wrong and staying with it. A lot of it goes back to when I was younger, when I was the best player on the team, and whether I was or not, I had that in my head. It comes from knowing that I've played in the big leagues for two years and know I can do it up here.

ChopTalk: You've had four multi-home run games. You don't go up there intending to hit homers, do you?

LaRoche: No, but I think I used to. I've got a natural fly-ball swing, so those home runs are just coming on accident.

ChopTalk: Last season, you hit 20 home runs, and by Aug. 8 this season, you had 23. That's a pretty significant increase.

LaRoche: I think they should keep going up. Obviously, if I hit 40 one year, I'm probably not going to come back the next season and hit 45. It's not going to keep climbing forever, but they will with more experience, more time in the league, confidence and just physically getting stronger.

ChopTalk: Do you attribute a lot of your hitting success to being the everyday first baseman?

LaRoche: Probably -- it's a combination. It's a totally different feeling coming to the ballpark knowing you're in the lineup. I don't even know if it's a lefty or righty [pitching]. That's the way it used to be, and that's the way I'd like the rest of my career to be, where I'm playing every game unless I'm hurt, getting that consistency. I got the chance early in the year for a couple of games against lefties, and I didn't [get it done], so I went back to platooning. I don't blame them for that; [manager] Bobby [Cox] couldn't try it forever. So now, to get the chance and to take advantage of it, get some hits off lefties, is nice.

ChopTalk: How would you describe this season for you personally and from a team perspective?

LaRoche: I don't think I'll ever think I had a good year. I had a decent rookie year, .278 and drove in a few runs and wasn't playing every day. In the offseason [looking back], it's never good enough. It would take hitting .330 with a ton of damage to say that's the kind of year I want to have. But when everything is said and done and I look back, I won't be satisfied because I think I'm a lot better than what I'm doing. For the team, it's been confusing. Nobody can figure out what we need, what's going on, why we're losing. There have been tons of conversations. The hitting can be blamed for [losing] some games, and the pitching can be blamed.

ChopTalk: What's going on with your hamstring? Is it something you're going to have to live with?

LaRoche: I think I tore it last year, then tweaked it earlier this season. I thought resting it over the offseason would have healed it. I thought it was gone completely until I did it again this season, and the trainers said it was probably the same injury. I think when I retire, a couple of years after that, it will be better! **ChopTalk:** Do you have a theory about why you hit better on the road than at home?

LaRoche: None! I don't get it. It's frustrating, since we lose a lot at home and I've had plenty of chances to change that. We don't face better pitching at home than on the road.

ChopTalk: A couple of years ago, you had a deal with Chipper Jones that if you reached a certain hitting level, you would get to hunt at his Double Dime Ranch in Texas. Do you have anything like that this season?

LaRoche: No, I'm just going to shoot [a deer], regardless of what I do this year! I'll just invite myself.

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