

Atlanta Braves All-Star center fielder Ender Inciarte on 2018 Atlanta Braves: “I think we can challenge the Nationals for NL East crown in 2018.”

Disney Sports recently caught up with Atlanta Braves All-Star center fielder Ender Inciarte during a break from off-season workouts at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex.

Inciarte and the rest of his Braves teammates concluded their first full-squad spring training workout of the season on Feb. 19. The speedy Inciarte is cautiously optimistic about his team’s chances in 2018 and hopes the season ends with Atlanta’s first trip to MLB’s postseason since 2013.

DS: You are a Major League All-Star center fielder who trains here at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex with a bunch of NFL prospects preparing for the NFL Scouting Combine and the NFL Draft. Why are you here?

EI: “The first thing I did last year when I was getting ready for the season was work on my body to get stronger. I have a really good relationship with a lot of Major League Baseball players, and I started talking with Carlos Gonzalez. He told me to come here [ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex] and try the workouts with coach Shaw for a couple of weeks. He told me that if I liked it, I should stay until the end of the sessions. When I got here, we worked really hard in the weight room, but then we started doing lots of conditioning work outside on the football fields and on the track. It didn’t take long for me to realize that this was exactly the kind of off-season training I needed to be participating in.”

DS: Obviously, coach Shaw’s program paid immediate dividends. You won your second National League Gold Glove award, had a career-best 201 hits and earned a spot on the 2017 National League All-Star team.

EI: “That’s what I want to keep doing. I don’t want to be a guy who takes two steps forward and one step back. I want to keep getting better and know the work we put in here with coach Shaw at the sports complex helped me tremendously last year, so that’s why I train here.”

DS: The Braves play in the rugged National League East. How realistic is it for you guys to be competitive in your division this season?

EI: “I think we have a really good shot to win a lot of games against our division opponents and win the division. At the end of year, we played a lot of games against division opponents, and we won a lot of those games, so I think we can challenge the Nationals for the NL East crown in 2018. We’ve got a good shot, but the bottom line is that we’ve got to go out there and prove it.”

DS: As a professional athlete, you've worked with a number of professional trainers. What's different about coach Shaw's program?

EI: "I like the combination of all of the speed, core, strength and conditioning work that coach Shaw incorporates within his program. You can work hard in the weight room, you can work hard on your core. You can stretch a lot, and for a guy like me, I rely a lot on my speed. I've got to be fast as a center fielder, and I know what I've been doing here is working. I'm stronger. I feel better than I've ever felt during this point of the offseason, and I've never felt this fast at this point of the offseason, so the goal is to keep doing what I've been doing and stay healthy."

DS: What's the prognosis for the Braves this season?

EI: "Our new GM [Alex Anthopoulos] has been very aggressive. He wants to put this team in position to win games. I feel we've been in a rebuild mode for the past three years and now, you can see some of the moves we made start to come together. We've got a lot of young players, but we have a lot of talent, too. We've got a lot of good players coming up and we've got a lot of good players on the team, too. We all believe that this year is going to be a lot better, and hopefully, we will be able to surprise a lot of people."

Ender Inciarte At-A-Glance

MLB Debut - May 2, 2014 for the Arizona Diamondbacks

Inciarte joined the Atlanta Braves via trade from Arizona on December 9, 2015

Jersey number — #11

Batting Average — .295

Hits - 628

Hits in 2017 — 201

Home Runs - 24

Runs batted in - 158

Runs scored - 305

Stolen bases - 78

All-Star Appearance - (1) National League - 2017

Gold Glove Awards - (2) — 2016, 2017